

THE JOURNAL

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Trusted Solutions for a Better Florida

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The Journal is provided to select members of The James Madison Institute, to members of the Legislature, and to others who affect public policy in Florida. The Journal is intended to keep Floridians informed about their government, to advance practical policy solutions, to stimulate civil discussion of major issues, and to recognize individuals who exemplify civic responsibility, character, and service to others. Opinions expressed in The Journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of The James Madison Institute, its staff, or its Board of Directors. All rights reserved. ©Fall 2019

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Building a Legacy

Michael Durden

Prominent American business magnate John Moody once said that “the United States as we know it today is largely the result of mechanical inventions, and in particular of agricultural machinery and the railroad.”

My father was a railroad man.

In 1980, Earl Durden founded two railroad companies—Rail Management Corp. and Rail Switching Services, Inc. Those

companies created a legacy that has lived on going on a dozen years since his passing. He was an icon in the railroad industry not only because he operated efficient and safely run railroads, but because of his commitment to and love for this country. That dedication was borne out in many of his civic and community activities. In addition to serving as long-time chair of the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association, he was

as a member of the Florida Base Relocation Appointment Committee, served on the Bay County Economic Development Alliance, chaired the K-12 grade Sub-Committee of the Florida State University-Panama City Presidential Blue Ribbon Committee, was on the board of the Florida Council of 100, as well as director and past chairman of the Florida Justice Reform Institute. Each of those roles allowed my dad to express his overwhelming gratitude for all the success and prosperity that he had been blessed with.

In addition to his many philanthropic efforts, he served on the Board of Directors at The James Madison Institute. He joined the JMI board in 2003 and it proved to be one of the most valuable organizational relationships he had. Over time, he was able to marry his commitments to his family and businesses with his beliefs in the wisdom of freedom, capitalism, and liberty—and JMI was the vehicle for that. He saw a very different Florida emerge over the more than two decades he spent in the Panama City area. He cherished the ability to work with principled conservatives to guide the state to be a beacon for economic liberty and opportunity.

Since his passing, I have had the distinct honor and privilege of carrying on his legacy. That legacy has lived on through the Durden Foundation—we have supported cancer research, veteran programs, education, the special Olympics, among many other worthy endeavors.

I count The James Madison Institute among those worthy endeavors. JMI's work in promoting the principles that my father, I, and my family hold dear—and their

ability to objectively position the Sunshine State as the north star of prosperity for the rest of the country has led me to the conclusion that Florida's story is of vital importance to the nation in the years to come. The Sunshine State's path should be two-fold—continue to protect our state from unwise policy, and export our success across the country. As conservatives and believers in federalism, we should be seeking a 50-state ground game to win hearts and minds over to the wisdom of free market capitalism, limited government, and economic liberty.

This is why my family's foundation, through a multi-year commitment, is launching the Durden Center for the Advancement of Liberty at JMI. This anchor gift will, we hope, serve as a catalyst for Florida to extend its reach to the other 49 states, while at the same time ensuring that future leaders in Washington understand that the founders' wisdom was one in which the states serve as laboratories of democracy and policy solutions emerge from the bottom up—not the top down.

The Durden Family Foundation has planted our flag on the beach of freedom in Florida with JMI—we now want to advance it forward and I look forward to bringing along many on the journey in the years ahead.

Michael E. Durden is the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Kedrick Cerry, Inc., a private investment firm based in Panama City, FL. He is also the Chairman of The Durden Foundation, a private charitable organization based in Panama City.



Liberty & Opportunity for All— Conservatism & “The Florida Way”

Paul Renner

From the Reagan era to the 2016 election, there was little difference among those who embraced the conservative label. Like your favorite brand, you knew what to expect. Yet during the 2016 primaries, diverse candidates like Donald Trump, Jeb Bush, Ted Cruz and John Kasich each uniformly described themselves as conservative, but there were clear differences in both style and substance. Two generations

removed from the “Reagan Revolution,” Reagan’s descendants were often speaking past each other. While conservatism’s core philosophical foundations remain the same, conservatism’s policies and focus are shifting to meet the historical challenges of this era.

Since Ronald Reagan swept Jimmy Carter out of office, there has been an unmistakable leftward shift among elites who

control our major institutions, globally and in our country. This new dynamic explains who conservatives elect to office and the shift in our policy priorities. Take free trade, for example. While efficient from a market perspective, when the picture emerged that global trade advocates had compromised our national security by creating dependence on hostile nations like China, conservatives took notice. Legacy media may decry conservative “nationalism” in ominous tones, but conservatives have reasonably retreated in their support of global trade to favor American interests and American workers. Other changes in what conservatives emphasize today follow a similar pattern.

The changes on the political left represent a profile very different in kind from your father’s tax and spend liberals for whom politics was only one aspect of life, who nevertheless joined us at church, shared our belief in free speech, and at holiday gatherings respected the adage that “we don’t talk about politics and religion.” For today’s left, politics *is* religion. Turning politics into a religious faith, the left now promotes the *politicization of everything*. It seeks to dominate or replace true religious faith, the nuclear family, and every other institution in America that might oppose it. Conservatism’s priorities have changed in both substance and tone because we are facing a radical cultural revolution that seeks to redefine everything, including what you can say—or even believe—in the land of the free.

In their push to politicize everything, the left is mainstreaming self-destructive ideas once limited to university campuses.

Only religious devotion can explain why they care more that our military receive CRT training than address China’s military expansion and threat to world peace; why they push to shut down key elements of our energy sector in their worship of climate alarmism and the statist control it will require; and, why they want to indoctrinate our children and deny parents the primary role of raising their children (while almost half of our 3rd grade students fail to read on grade level). If you challenge their doctrinal tenets, they want you cancelled. Cancel culture is nothing more than a means of enforcing their politico-religious orthodoxy on the rest of us. It’s a new, more dangerous Inquisition.

Our nation was founded by various religious refugees who wanted to keep the state out of religion to avoid the persecution they had experienced before they fled their home countries. It resulted in the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. For many of us, our faith brings us to conservatism as the best secular model for a secular world, but we can unequivocally say that conservatism is not our religion. My faith is Christianity, not politics. I have no idea which of my fellow believers are Democrats and really don’t care. We share a common bond, a non-political one. In fact, most people of faith understand that merging religion and politics is dangerous and can result in corrupting both.

In practice, the left’s shift to politics as religion means their own doubts can never be spoken out loud and they become trapped in irrational policy prescriptions that are immune to reason and countervailing facts. Politics-turned-faith allows

an irrational idea like Defund the Police to proceed unquestioned while new crime victims pile up. Even when the facts revealed clear spikes in crime, the left held firm until it became politically untenable. The same is now happening with the effort to shut down large sections of our energy sector. A rational assessment would conclude that this will induce an energy crisis, but it's an article of faith that strict carbon neutral timelines must be met. The negative real consequences for real people will remain a non-factor until it's too late.

Conservatism advocates for the reason-tested principles of freedom described in the Declaration of Independence and enshrined in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. Freedom and liberty worked in 1776 and they work just as well today. And the path is never static—as a state and as a nation, we are in a constant state of movement—either in the direction of freedom and opportunity or away from it. Conservatives want freedom, liberty, and opportunity for everyone, not just those who agree with us. As a veteran who served in Desert Storm and Afghanistan, I was privileged to join our great military to protect the freedom of all Americans, including those who do not share my views. When conservatives speak about founding principles, those principles protect and serve everyone. Significantly, the conservative principles we follow come through application of common sense and asking what works in the real world. The principles of the left have no such limitation. Coming from academia, where abstract ideas win praise without a moment's contact with reality, it is no surprise their solutions fail spectacularly

when implemented in the real world.

Unfortunately, there are a few on the right who claim to be conservative for whom politics has become a religion of their own, complete with anger, irrationality and a disregard for the rule of law. A Republican candidate for the state house angrily tweeted that “Under my plan, all Floridians will be able to shoot FBI, IRS, ATF, and all other federal troops on sight. Let freedom ring.” Anyone on the right who disregards the rule of law or speaks in the language of leftist groups like Antifa may have a name, but it's not conservatism. True conservatives will stand for freedom, the rule of law and the Constitution—always.

Instead of rage, what we need in this moment is principled and courageous conservatives who, like Margaret Thatcher, are not for turning. I firmly believe that the future of American conservatism is being defined and put into practice here in Florida by Governor Ron DeSantis and the Florida Legislature. All eyes are on Florida. What we do here has and will continue to influence what happens in other states. For the nation, Florida has become the beacon of hope as we suffer through the leftist policies of the Biden Administration.

Florida is providing conservative leadership at the state level that places us on a collision course with the Biden Administration and our philosophical opposites at the state level. Think Gavin Newsome and the California Legislature. Federalism allows us to watch the competition between what I call the Florida Way and the California Way, two dramatically different visions that are vying to represent our nation's future. Spoiler alert: businesses and people are

leaving California in droves, while businesses and people are *coming to* Florida in droves.

During COVID, blue states like California decided that casinos and abortion clinics were essential, but churches were not. In Florida, we declared everyone essential. California locked down; Florida remained open and free. Governor DeSantis and the Florida Legislature led the fight against the Biden Administration, so people did not lose their jobs over unconstitutional vaccine and mask mandates. California ordered children with little risk from COVID to remain masked, while Gavin Newsome dined at fancy restaurants unmasked with friends. The California Way is that the rules don't apply to our masters, just the rest of us.

The Florida Way understands that parents are responsible for raising their children. The California Way thinks parents have no business determining what is taught to their children in school. The Florida Way quickly returned students to in-person learning, avoiding major learning losses experienced in blue states, which kept children home far longer. The California Way will cast a tragic COVID shadow over an entire generation of children, both academically and psychologically.

The California Way embraces woke prosecutors who object to their main role: prosecuting criminals. The Florida Way was

demonstrated when the legislature passed HB 1, which said yes to free speech but no to violent riots and destruction of property. The California Way has left a trail of victims who will never receive justice. The Florida Way stands for victims and sends perpetrators straight to prison.

Like the Governor, I am laser focused on protecting our constitution and the rule of law while expanding freedom, liberty, and opportunity for all Floridians. Along with my colleagues in the legislature, like President-designate Kathleen Passidomo, we intend to leave Florida better than we found it. We will pursue The Florida Way, advancing policies that benefit everyone in our state. We can and will fight aggressively, but without abandoning civility or a commitment to openly debate ideas with our colleagues on the other side. Our challenges are great, but we fully intend to tackle them. Florida will lead the nation, so that we can remain the Shining City on a Hill that Reagan once described. Conservatism has adapted to meet the historical moment, but our love for this country is as strong as ever, it calls us to action, and we will not be turning.

Paul Renner is the 2022-2024 Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives and represents district 24 which includes Flagler, Volusia, and parts of St. Johns counties.



A Quick Guide to Florida's 2022 Constitutional Amendments

Policy Team

Culminating on election day, November 8, 2022, more than 10 million Floridians will cast their votes. For this election, there are three proposed constitutional amendments on the November ballot. It is our pleasure to provide this 2022 Amendment Guide. We hope it is of value to Florida voters as they evaluate each of the three constitutional amendments that will be presented to them on their ballot. Each amendment is unique and should be

considered seriously. Repealing any amendment that has passed would require a new ballot initiative garnering 60 percent of the vote in a subsequent election. As always, the mission of The James Madison Institute is to inform citizens so that, together, we may chart the course of making Florida an even more prosperous state. It is in that context that we offer this analysis.

TYPE	TITLE	SUBJECT	DESCRIPTION
Legislatively-Referred	Amendment 1	Taxes	Prohibits flood resistance improvements to a home from being considered when determining the property's assessed value for property taxes
Citizen Initiated	Amendment 2	Direct Democracy	Abolishing the Constitution Revision Commission
Legislatively-Referred	Amendment 3	Taxes	Providing additional Homestead Property Tax exemption for certain public service workers

Limitation on the Assessment of Real Property Used for Residential Purposes

Ballot Language: “Proposing an amendment to the State Constitution, effective January 1, 2023, to authorize the Legislature, by general law, to prohibit the consideration of any change or improvement made to real property used for residential purposes to improve the property's resistance to flood damage in determining the assessed value of such property for ad valorem taxation purposes.”

How the Amendment Reached the Ballot: Florida State Legislature

What Your Vote Means:

A **YES** vote on this amendment: Authorizes the Florida State Legislature to pass laws prohibiting flood resistance improvements to residential property from being considered when determining that residential property's assessed value for property taxes.

A **NO** vote on this amendment: Permits flood resistance improvements to residential property to continue to be considered when determining that residential property's assessed value for property taxes.

Pros: Florida is uniquely at risk of flooding and sea level rise. Supporters of this amendment argue that it will not only protect homeowners who take proactive measures to protect their property from flooding, but it will also reward and incentivize them to do so. This bipartisan amendment received 98.33% approval in the Florida House of Representatives and 100% approval in the Florida State Senate in 2021.

Cons: Opponents would argue that prohibiting these improvements from being considered in the assessed value for property taxes would ultimately reduce the amount of ad valorem taxes that could be collected to fund services by local governments. This reduction is minimal but should be noted.

Constitutional Merit: This measure is not a reform that can be addressed by the State Legislature and thus requires a constitutional ballot initiative in order to be implemented.

In Sum: While the passage of this amendment would incentivize homeowners to protect their property against flood damage by giving them a tax break, it would also minimally reduce the amount of ad valorem taxes available to fund local governments. A YES vote would authorize the Florida Legislature to enact laws prohibiting

flood resistance improvements to residential property from being considered when determining the assessed value for property taxes. A NO vote would continue to allow flood resistance improvements to residential property to be considered when determining the assessed value for property taxes.

AMENDMENT 2

Abolishing the Constitution Revision Commission

Ballot Language: “Proposing an amendment to the State Constitution to abolish the Constitution Revision Commission, which meets at 20-year intervals and is scheduled to next convene in 2037, as a method of submitting proposed amendments or revisions to the State Constitution to electors of the state for approval. This amendment does not affect the ability to revise or amend the State Constitution through citizen initiative, constitutional convention, the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission, or legislative joint resolution.”

How the Amendment Reached the Ballot: Florida State Legislature

What Your Vote Means:

A YES vote on this amendment: Supports abolishing the Florida Constitution Revision Commission (CRC). The CRC meets every 20 years to propose changes to the state’s constitution and refer them to the statewide ballot for voter approval or rejection.

A NO vote on this amendment: Opposes abolishing the Florida Constitution Revision Commission (CRC).

Pros: The CRC is a 37-member commission provided for in the Florida constitution that sets its own rules and procedures. Florida is the only state with a commission that can refer constitutional amendments to the ballot for voter approval or denial. In 2018, seven out of eight amendments referred to the ballot by the CRC were the subject of lawsuits alleging that the amendments were unconstitutionally composed of multiple subjects or contained inaccurate or misleading language. Supporters of this amendment contend that abolishing the CRC is necessary to protect Florida voters from multiple subject or vague amendments proposed by ill-experienced members.

Cons: Opponents of this amendment argue that lawmakers should improve the CRC by tightening its procedures and required qualifications for its members instead of abolishing the commission entirely. They believe that the commission provides an important vehicle for constituents’ voices to be heard.

Constitutional Merit: This measure is not a reform that can be addressed by the State Legislature and thus requires a constitutional ballot initiative in order to be implemented.

In Sum: While the passage of this amendment may protect Florida voters from multiple subject or vague amendments, it would also remove one of five ways to amend the Florida constitution. A YES vote would abolish the CRC, while a NO vote would keep the CRC and its authority in place.

AMENDMENT 3***Additional Homestead Property Tax Exemption for Specified Critical Public Services Workforce***

Ballot Language: “Proposing an amendment to the State Constitution to authorize the Legislature, by general law, to grant an additional homestead tax exemption for non-school levies of up to \$50,000 of the assessed value of homestead property owned by classroom teachers, law enforcement officers, correctional officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, paramedics, child welfare services professionals, active duty members of the United States Armed Forces, and Florida National Guard members. This amendment shall take effect January 1, 2023.”

How the Amendment Reached the Ballot: Florida State Legislature

What Your Vote Means:

A **YES** vote on this amendment: Authorizes the Florida Legislature to provide an additional homestead property tax exemption of \$50,000 of assessed value on property owned by certain public service workers, including teachers, law enforcement officers, emergency medical personnel, active duty members of the military and Florida National Guard, and child welfare service employees.

A **NO** vote on this amendment: Opposes authorizing the Florida Legislature to provide an additional homestead tax exemption on \$50,000 of assessed value on property owned by certain public service workers.

Pros: Every primary residence in Florida is eligible for a homestead tax exemption of \$25,000. An additional homestead tax exemption of \$25,000 is available on the property’s value between \$50,000 and \$75,000, bringing the total possible homestead tax exemption for all primary residences in Florida to \$50,000. This amendment would authorize an additional homestead property tax exemption of \$50,000 on the property’s value between \$100,000 and \$150,000 only for primary residences owned by qualifying public service workers.

Supporters of this measure contend that, given the increased home values and property taxes, critical public service workers deserve a tax break. They argue that because these specific categories of public service workers sacrifice much to protect our state, we should help ensure they can afford to keep their homes. This amendment is consistent with the House’s commitment to affordable housing.

Cons: The Revenue Estimating Conference estimated that approval of the amendment would reduce local property tax revenue (except school district tax revenue) by \$85.9 million beginning in Fiscal Year 2023-2024. Therefore, opponents of this measure argue that the exemption would greatly jeopardize the funds available for local government services, while not guaranteeing that public service workers can even purchase homes, much less afford to keep them. In addition, some would contend that this amendment would be a case of creating tax policy that favors specific groups over others. Rather than provide an additional exemption to select public service workers, Florida should look to lower property tax

rates for all homestead property.

Constitutional Merit: This measure is not a reform that can be addressed by the State Legislature and thus requires a constitutional ballot initiative in order to be implemented.

In Sum: While this amendment would give an additional homestead tax exemption to much-deserving, qualified public service workers, it would also greatly reduce the local property tax revenue available to fund local governments. A YES vote would authorize the Florida Legislature to implement this tax exemption. A NO vote would keep the homestead tax exemptions the same.



Will Florida's Future Also Be America's?

John Fund

COLUMNIST, NATIONAL REVIEW

Every year, U-Haul gathers all its data on its two million annual one-way truck rentals into a U-Haul Growth Index. It's an effective gauge on how well cities and states are both attracting and keeping residents

The hands-down “winner” since the COVID-19 pandemic began has been Florida. Ten Florida markets are among the top 25 growth cities in the country, U-Haul reported earlier this year.

“We have lower cost (of living) than other states. There is no state income tax—that’s a huge factor. The warm weather,” explains Mario Martinez, U-Haul Vice President of Southern Florida. “Jobs play a very important part in people moving into Florida. And during this pandemic for the past two years, we’ve also pretty much been open the entire time.” Other experts add that crime concerns in many other locales are a key reason so many people are seeking

out Florida's freedom and security

Nor is U-Haul data the only indicator that people are flocking to the Sunshine State. Verizon is citing a "massive, pandemic-related influx of people into Florida" for its decision to invest \$149 million in Florida. The company says that from January 2020 to April 2022, over 250,000 Verizon wireless customers moved to Florida, causing network congestion. During that time, peak-hour Verizon wireless traffic volume was up 408 percent in Orlando, 364 percent in Miami, 173 percent in Fort Myers and 165 percent in West Palm Beach.

Moving With The Flow

For decades, the states attracting the most refugees have been low-tax, low-regulation places like Texas, Florida, Utah and Idaho. In recent years, the states bleeding the most people are big government states like California, Illinois and Michigan. U-Haul vans can be three, four or five times more expensive to rent for a move to Florida from, say, New York than the reverse routing.

Florida-based Blue Line Moving has become famous among conservatives who want to move to red states. Owner John Rourke, a 16-year Army veteran, says, "I want to angle my business to be the mover of the Conservative party. His trucks feature an American flag, and his employees often wear "Let's Go, Brandon" T-shirts.

Last year, Donald Trump Jr. hired Blue Line to transport a piano. It's since also moved Florida GOP Congressman Brian Mast and Fox's Sean Hannity.

His customers aren't just celebrities. Carl David and his wife Arlyn used Blue

Line to move their fourth-generation fine art gallery from Philadelphia to Palm Beach last year. "Florida is wonderful. This is America," he told the New York Post. "It's business-friendly, politically friendly and the weather is great."

Florida has now surpassed New York to become the nation's third largest state, with 23 million people. Between 2010 and 2020 its population grew at double the national rate, and that has only accelerated during the pandemic. It is now adding 1,000 new residents a day. With eight of the top ten beaches in the world, it's no surprise Florida has become the top destination of foreign tourists as well as foreigners moving to America, supplanting California in both categories. Florida has become emblematic of much of America and central to all of it. The state is on the rise," the Economist magazine reports.

The Powerhouse

Florida's economy is now a powerhouse. If it were a country, it would be the world's 15th largest economy, bigger than all of Mexico. As of July 2022, Florida's unemployment rate is only 2.7 percent, and its private sector job growth has also exceeded the nation's for the last 14 months.

Politically, Florida is clearly the nation's biggest manifestation of a rightward shift in the electorate.

In 2012, Florida had 558,000 more registered Democratic voters than Republicans; today Republicans have the lead by more than 100,000 voters and climbing.

All but one of Florida's statewide elected officials are Republicans, both houses of the legislature are Republican as are both of its

U.S. Senators. The state currently sends 16 Republicans and 11 Democrats to the U.S. House, but a new redistricting map will likely shift that margin to 19 Republicans and nine Democrats.

All this is happening even as the state is increasingly diverse. More than one in five Floridians were born in another country.

“Even as Florida becomes more diverse it is becoming more Red, contrary to what the Left likes to say when they argue ‘Demographics are destiny’” says Bob McClure, president of The James Madison Institute, the state’s premier think tank. McClure is a 7th-generation Floridian, with his great grandfather having served on the state’s Supreme Court.

If Florida resident Donald Trump doesn’t become the Republican nominee in 2024, its GOP Governor Ron DeSantis is the clear front-runner. Both men have helped fuel a move to the GOP among Hispanic voters of all backgrounds, not just those from Cuba.

But former New York Times journalist David Shribman points out that Florida is chock full of potential presidential talent: “Trump, DeSantis, and Florida’s two Senators, Rick Scott and Marco Rubio, are all possible candidates from the same state at the same time,” he writes. “Florida, modern mother of presidents.”

Sound Policy

Lastly, Florida matters because it offers a case study in sound economic policy.

It charges no income tax, which enhances its appeal, as do the pro-business attitudes of the state’s leaders. The pandemic has prompted people and firms to

reconsider where they want to be based, leading many to move out of high-tax, high-regulation states (such as New York and California) to Florida and Texas, which are pro-business and tax-light. Silicon Valley and Wall Street types are attracted to a place where politicians welcome them and never condemn their success.

What are the specific factors that have pushed Florida forward?

Interviews with a variety of experts in the state say its advantages have the following roots:

DIVERSIFICATION OF THE ECONOMY

Once rooted in recreation and theme parks, the Interstate-4 corridor between Tampa and Orlando has joined Miami in becoming a new national tech hub.

Film and video production startups, a new Disney campus that feeds that company’s demand for entertainment product, and an influx of engineers has created a vibrant local version of Silicon Valley. The growing private space industry promises to bring even more high-tech jobs to Florida in the future.

THE LATIN CONNECTION

Miami has always been a gateway to Latin America. Today the familial connections of its immigrant population have led to the explosive growth of financial services and Spanish language film and video production. “As Latin America becomes more volatile, Miami’s connections are cross cultural and multi-cultural and create a stability many Latins are seeking,” says Rodolfo Milani, who runs Miami’s Freedom Forum meeting.

EDUCATION

Jeb Bush, who was Florida's governor from 1999 to 2007, began a dramatic period of education reform in the state. Charter schools, new rules that permitted more home schooling, and educational choice opportunities for many lower-income students have improved the state's test scores and prospects for its high school graduates. Ron DeSantis has improved the pay of teachers so that it is now an attractive profession that can retain talent.

SMALL GOVERNMENT

A big advantage Florida has is that California and Northeastern states seem to be doing all they can to push people out.

Florida is a model of lean governance. It has the lowest number of government employees per head of all 50 states. State spending per citizen is also the lowest in America at \$3,845 a year, 40 percent below the national average. "Florida actually reduced inflation-adjusted expenditures per person for more than a quarter of a century starting in the 1990s," says Randy Holcombe, a professor at Florida State University. "That's remarkable."

A half dozen states are now following Florida's model of no income tax and moving to abolish theirs.

Florida's Pandemic Response

A new working paper by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) compares COVID outcomes in all 50 states based on three variables: the economy, education and mortality.

The top 10 in the rankings are smaller states with the notable exception of Florida, which ranks sixth. That will strike many

people as remarkable given the media coverage that Florida's refusal to lockdown its economy and beaches was the height of folly. Governor DeSantis was smeared with the moniker "Governor DeathSentence."

In reality, Florida ranks 28th in mortality, in the middle of the pack and about the same as California, which ranks 27th despite its far more stringent lockdowns and school closures. But Florida ranks third for the least education loss and 13th in economic performance. California ranks 47th overall because its shutdowns crushed the economy (40th) and in-person school (50th).

The Wall Street Journal concluded: "Florida did about average on mortality as other states, but it did far better in protecting its citizens from severe economic harm and its children from lost schooling."

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Miami was once known for being a sleepy refuge for Latin American capital flight. It is now fast becoming a hub for technology and venture capital investment.

The current surge began when technology investor Delian Asparouhov sent out a message to friends during the height of the pandemic in 2020: "Ok guys hear me out, what if we move Silicon Valley to Miami."

Miami Mayor Francis Suarez promptly replied: "How can I help?" He followed up by taking out a billboard in San Francisco. "Thinking of moving to Miami?" it read. "DM me."

He quickly rolled out the red carpet. Soon Elon Musk, Peter Thiel and a host of other tech giants were tramping through his Art Deco office in the former headquarters

of Pan American Airlines in Miami.

Suarez's pitch was simple. Along with zero state and local income taxes, new arrivals would find the services of a responsive government that encourages innovation. Miami offers an expedited electronic-permitting process and a host of incentive programs and grants to local companies. Mayor Suarez is bent on making his city a vibrant high-tech entrepreneurial hub. He has even embraced Musk's idea of building a \$30 million tunnel for electric vehicles under downtown Miami to ease the city's growing traffic congestion.

Venture capitalists Keith Rabois, David Sacks and Sherwin Pishevar have moved to Miami following Suarez's aggressive outreach efforts.

NICHE INDUSTRIES

Florida has long been known for retirement, tourism and trade with Latin America. But it is now attracting niche industries.

Take conservative media. NewsMax has been based in Florida since its inception in the 1990s. Now many companies are joining it. Trump Media & Technology, which owns the social media app Truth Social, is a new Florida company. So too is Rumble, a video platform commonly used by conservatives. Radio host Dan Bongino has moved his company to Florida. Jimmy Finkelstein, the former publisher of the Capitol Hill website The Hill, is starting a new media company in Florida.

WHERE IS THE SUNSHINE STATE'S FUTURE CLOUDY?

Granted, Florida currently has many advantages that have fueled its growth. But what about its challenges and shortcomings?

Despite the fact that Florida's government has been run almost completely by Republicans for the last quarter century, its politics often remain parochial and short-sighted. "We don't have a principled, free-market legislature," says Sam Staley, an expert in the state's economic development at Florida State University. "We have one focused on the politics of the moment."

As much as Florida governors from Jeb Bush through Ron DeSantis have tried to improve the state's business climate, there are gaps.

There has been little privatization of government services at the local level, and while taxes remain low there are many cities that use petty fines to raise revenue and harass residents. Only this year did the state begin to tackle its archaic property insurance market, which had long impeded real estate transactions.

The state still has a bias towards excessive litigation, driven by a well-entrenched corps of trial lawyers, many of whom block reform from positions of power in the legislature.

Since the 1980s, the state has followed a highly top-down approach to land planning and environmental regulation. The cleanup of the Everglades has largely been a success story, but it could have come faster if local flexibility had been encouraged.

The state still has severe infrastructure gaps.

The state could do much more to develop its system of ports, expanding trade and making it easier for companies based in the state to coordinate their logistics.

In addition, Staley says “We have terrible cross-Florida transportation linkages. It’s astonishing how weak our local city airline services are. Getting from Jacksonville or Tallahassee to south Florida is very difficult.” A promising development is Brightline, a new private train line that uses existing railroad rights of way and promises passenger links between the Orlando area and all south Florida within the next few years.

WHAT IS FLORIDA’S FUTURE?

The state has come a long way from the time it had only one million people in 1920 and was ridiculed as a swamp-infested backwater with insufferable summer heat and an array of dangerous predators from alligators to mosquitos.

The New Deal-funded authors of the Federal Writers Project 1939 guide to the state called it “a flood-lighted stage of frivolity and a behind-the-scenes struggle for existence.”

Today, the reality is far different.

Historian Gary Mormino writes in his new book on Florida called “Dreams In The New Century” that: “In almost every significant index of American life—the sheer numbers and influence of the foreign born, the old and new nuances of race, the jigsaw patterns of residential life, environmental challenges, the pursuit of happiness and political melodrama—Florida matters.”

Mormino boldly says that Florida has now challenged California to become America’s cultural and demographic touchstone.

As Florida looks forward to its future, it increasingly will dictate what America’s future will be.

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ESG Social Credit Scores and the Threats They Pose to Freedom

Jack McPherrin & Justin Haskins

The idea that a pseudo-secret cabal of global powerbrokers are using their combined wealth and influence to subvert the will of free individuals, consolidate their own power, and enrich themselves in the process might sound like a conspiracy theory to some. Unfortunately, it is not a theory; rather, it is a blatant conspiracy bent on political, economic, and social domination of the world, which would by design

leave America's democratic institutions civil liberties, and economic freedoms shattered in its wake. Those of us who still value freedom, and remain comfortably ensconced in the western democratic tradition, must take heed of this threat and fight it with every fiber of our being.

Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) scores are the chief mechanism by which a diverse and highly influential

group of financial institutions, investment managers, international organizations, and governmental regulatory authorities are implementing a top-down restructuring of the global economy. If successful, this “great reset” would consolidate economic power and societal decision-making in the hands of a relatively small and unelected faction of elites, severely restricting economic and social opportunities for hundreds of billions of people worldwide.

ESG metrics are a social credit scoring system that seeks to change how businesses are measured by banks, governments, investors, and other institutions. Rather than focusing upon a company’s quality of goods and services, profits, and other more traditional business metrics, ESG evaluates businesses largely upon their commitments to social justice and environmental activism. Companies are then assigned scores, usually a number or letter grade, so that businesses can either be rewarded or punished.

As an example, one influential set of ESG metrics developed by the International Business Council (IBC) rates business entities based on 55 categories. Among others, these include “Diversity and inclusion,” “Governance body composition,” “Economic, environmental, and social topics in capital allocation framework,” “Paris-aligned GHG [greenhouse gas] emissions targets,” “Impact of freshwater consumption and withdrawal,” “Impact of air pollution,” “Impact of solid waste disposal,” and “Total social investment,” (Walter).

Thus, under the IBC’s ESG system, a business that is subjectively determined to employ too many individuals from a similar ethnic background, has an unbalanced

gender-identity ratio on its board of directors, emits “too much” carbon dioxide, consumes “too much” water, and / or does not invest enough in social causes, could be ranked lower than a competitor with an inferior product, service, or profit margin. By design, ESG aims to transform virtually all business activity, and society by extension.

A Brief History of ESG

Since its inception, free-market economic principles and individual property rights have served as the cornerstones of the U.S. economy. But over the past century, America’s free-market capitalist system has been besieged by advocates of greater government intervention and, more recently, by supporters of so-called “stakeholder capitalism,” the foundation of which is the ESG system.

Supporters of stakeholder capitalism claim that businesses and financial institutions have a duty to solve societal problems, reduce economic inequality, and serve the interests of the collective, regardless of whether such a strategy maximizes profits. This approach stands in sharp contrast to the more traditional free-market economic models supported by a long list of renowned economists, including Milton Friedman, who famously argued that the only responsibility a company has is to its shareholders (Friedman). Friedman rightly asserted that encouraging business owners’ natural motive to improve profits is the best method for encouraging economic growth, increasing the quality of life for all people, and fostering innovation.

Despite the efforts of Friedman and many of his peers, corporate social

responsibility (CSR) became increasingly popular toward the end of the 20th century and start of the 21st century, transforming the world's largest businesses into vehicles for "sustainable development." Many businesses, especially publicly traded corporations, were infused with what John Elkington coined in 1994 the "Triple Bottom Line": People, Planet, and Profits (Elkington). Well-funded global organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Economic Forum (WEF) quickly became some of the staunchest advocates for so-called "sustainable development" and "sustainable investment" in business practices.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, sustainable business principles were formalized and embedded within international frameworks, beginning with the United Nations' "Agenda 21" platform in 1992. By 2015, the United Nations had expanded its Agenda 21 framework numerous times, culminating in the release of "Sustainable Development Goals." There are 17 SDGs, including "zero hunger," "affordable and clean energy," "sustainable cities and communities," and "climate action" (United Nations).

From the start of the sustainable development movement, the United Nations, government officials, investors, the WEF, and others sought to pressure corporations and financial institutions to promote SDGs and their forerunners. Yet, it wasn't until the Obama era that significant progress was made in transforming businesses into advocates for UN-supported sustainability principles. This is best illustrated by looking at the remarkable rise of the United

Nations-backed Principles of Responsible Investment (PRI) association, a leader in the pro-ESG movement.

In 2006, PRI's membership included just 63 financial institutions, businesses, and government-related funds, representing approximately \$6.5 trillion in assets under management (AUM). But by early 2022, PRI reported having more than 4,700 signatories, representing \$100 trillion in AUM, with much of that growth occurring between 2010 and 2020 (Principles of Responsible Investment).

The ESG movement has been particularly effective in recruiting American business and investment leaders. In the United States, 98 percent of the country's top financial companies disclose ESG scores, and 82 percent include the information in annual reports to shareholders (Threlfall et al.).

The Perils of ESG

Although ESG is growing in popularity among many powerful institutions and their leaders, the system poses numerous threats to American prosperity and freedom.

For example, despite the veneer that ESG "cooperation" is voluntary, investors and financial institutions often resort to coercion to impose ESG. For example, companies with high ESG adherence are favorably rated by credit-scoring agencies, banks, and other financial institutions, and therefore become attractive targets for investment. Companies possessing low ESG scores are "screened out" of many financial services, killing investment activity that is needed for sustained financial growth (Bergman et al.). This effectively forces businesses to adhere to principles and standards that are

undesirable to their customers, business partners, and many shareholders, altering society in the process.

This problem is made even more troubling by the fact that ESG systems put a relatively small number of exceptionally wealthy institutions in charge of which products and services are allowed in a society, as well as how businesses operate. For example, investment firms such as BlackRock, State Street, and Vanguard, all of whom utilize ESG, control at least \$22 trillion in assets between them, as well as an average of 20 percent of the shareholder votes in companies in the S&P 500. These “Big Three” firms often wield their ESG power ruthlessly (Buller). For instance, they helped organize a takeover of ExxonMobil’s board of directors in 2021, ultimately replacing three of its 12 directors with climate activists committed to moving ExxonMobil away from offering products that produce carbon-dioxide emissions, Exxon’s primary business (Henisz).

Investment managers are not the only ones using ESG to transform the United States. Banks, financial service providers, and insurance companies are also at the forefront of the ESG movement. Global financial industry alliances that pledge to promote the use of ESG, such as the Net-Zero Asset Managers Initiative, the Net-Zero Banking Alliance, and the Net-Zero Insurance Alliance are some of the world’s most ardent sponsors of coercive ESG tactics.

The powerful Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ) is essentially an amalgam of the aforementioned

industry alliances. It consists of more than 450 banks, insurers, and asset managers from 45 countries. Together, the members of GFANZ control a staggering \$130 trillion in capital (Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero). All GFANZ members have agreed to use their wealth and economic influence to push companies to adopt and then increasingly improve their ESG scores through myriad policies, such as prohibiting lending to noncompliant companies.

The ESG movement isn’t done centralizing decision-making, either. In recent years, elites who support ESG models have sought to consolidate ESG standards into one overarching, top-down system, a move that would have lasting and irreversible effects on individual rights and market freedom. Currently, there are many ESG systems used throughout America and Europe, all with their own unique metrics. The International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) was created in 2021 to develop a single global system, which, if ESG’s backers have it their way, would be forced upon every single large corporation—and potentially every small business—on the planet (McPherrin).

Governmental regulatory authorities have worked hand-in-glove with these private sector actors to enforce ESG compliance. Most notably, the European Union (EU) is on the verge of imposing a mandatory ESG “due diligence” model for many EU corporations and the non-EU companies they do business with, including those located in the United States. The European Union’s Parliament and Commission have

already approved the proposal, although further action is needed before it becomes law (Flacks).

Some Americans might think their civil liberties and market freedoms will be guarded from ESG because of constitutional protections. Yet—because the U.S. Constitution’s provisions generally do not apply to privately-owned institutions or foreign actors—corporations, banks, foreign governments, and investment management firms are free to use ESG to reward or punish whomever they want. Federal and state laws could be passed, however, to forbid certain kinds of ESG discrimination, although a truly comprehensive anti-ESG law has yet to be passed in the United States.

ESG systems not only fundamentally distort market economies, but they also centralize economic and societal power in the hands of individuals and businesses

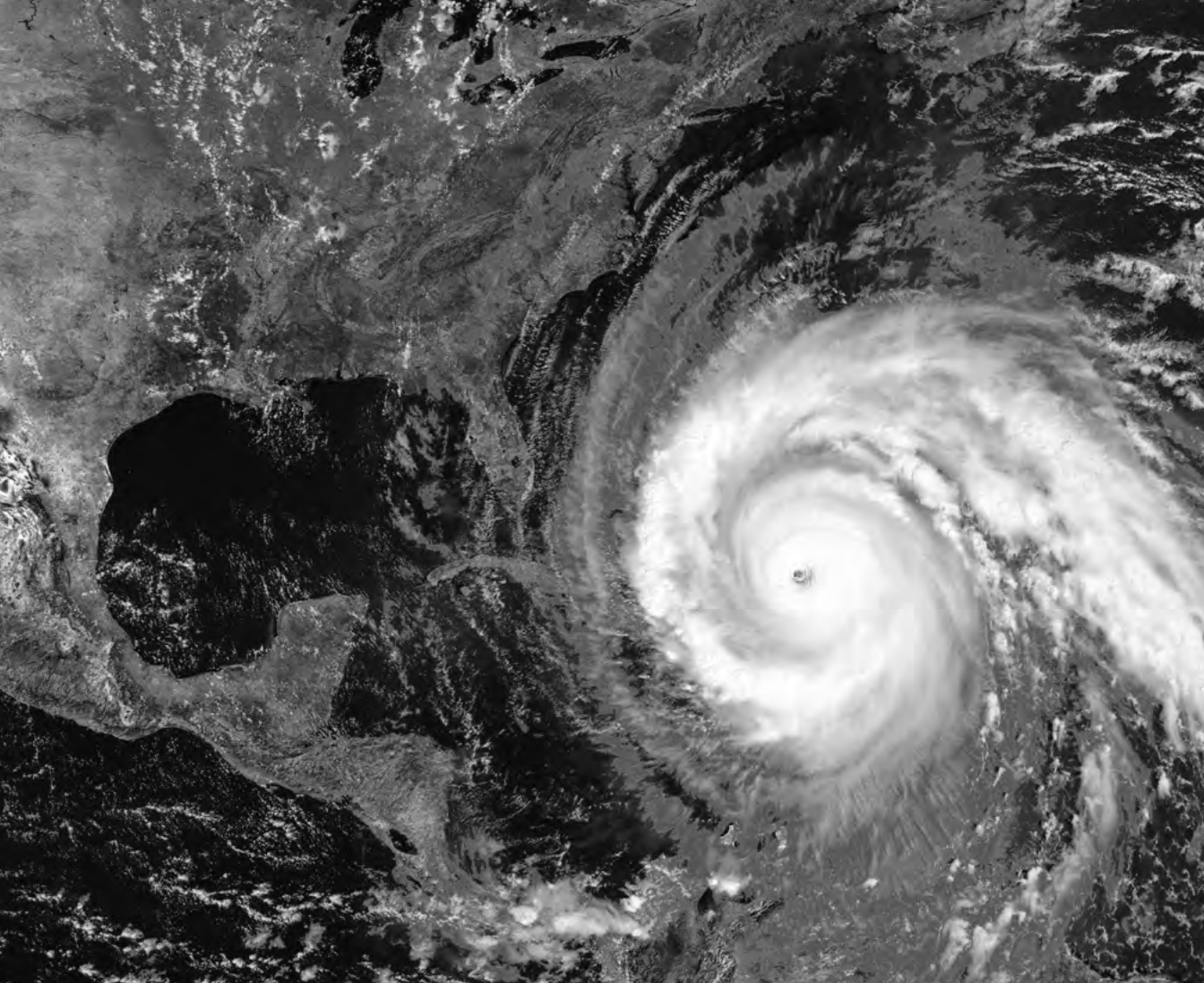
who are currently unaccountable to voters.

Whether this consortium of global elites and financial titans are pushing ESG for “noble” purposes, or are motivated by centralizing their power and padding their bank accounts, the end result would be the same: a significant loss of individual liberty and economic freedom for every American citizen, and the destruction of our democratic way of life. We must not allow that to happen.

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Hurricane Season May Be Here, But Florida Is the Best Place to Be for It

Victor V. Claar

Hurricane Season has arrived. But it's not just weather events people should be concerned about this year. Just like it's difficult to know exactly when or where a hurricane may strike, our economic fortunes for the coming year appear equally uncertain.

But, just like in weather-driven hurricane season, it's important to be located in

the safest place possible in case economic storms strike. And the good news is that Florida is probably the best place you can possibly be no matter how bad any coming economic challenges may be for the broader economy.

To understand why, it's helpful to take a look at a few numbers. For starters, let's return to 2020—the onset of the pandemic.

While few saw the pandemic coming, and despite the devastating health and life consequences it brought, at the end of its worst we learned that Florida had fared better than most states in terms of economic consequences. For starters, while GDP nationally fell by 3.4 percent for 2020, here in Florida it fell by a mere 2.8 percent.

But a broader and deeper look helps identify an even clearer picture of just how well Florida is recovering from the pandemic-driven recession. To begin, let's look at some jobs numbers for the US economy and then compare them to Florida in the same period.

Many readers will be familiar with the labor force participation rate that is reported each month as part of the Bureau of Labor Statistics' release called the Employment Situation—the release that includes the widely announced monthly unemployment rate. In February 2020, just before the onset of the pandemic, the nation's labor force participation rate—the percentage of employable Americans either working or actively looking for work—stood at 63.4 percent. This means that, among eligible adults, nearly two-thirds were either working or looking for jobs. Of course, the pandemic created a catastrophic drop: by April 2020 that rate had fallen to 60.2, yet by the end of the first quarter of 2022 that number had recovered to a mere 62.2.

Now let's compare those numbers to the same numbers for Florida at the same three times. In February 2020, the participation rate in the Sunshine State was 59.1 percent. Of course, this number is much lower overall in Florida than in other states due to the large share of our population who

are older than typical working-age adults. Many Floridians simply choose not to work at times—because they are either retirees or prefer to work only during seasonal travel months. But as the pandemic disrupted the Florida economy, the participation rate had fallen to 53.8—just two months later—by April. Yet, by March 2022, the rate had risen to 58.8. So even though Florida started with a lower overall participation rate than the broader US economy, we're much closer to our pre-pandemic levels than the rest of the nation.

While encouraging, these numbers alone don't begin to convey the robustness of the Florida labor market despite lingering fallout from the pandemic. So, while these comparisons are encouraging on their own, they assume that the size of the working-aged population remained constant throughout the period. But as media outlets at all levels have reported, Florida's population has swelled during the last three years because of the arrival of new Floridians from other US states. And in most parts of Florida, the labor market has been able to accommodate many of those new arrivals.

How well have available workers been connected to available jobs? Here in Southwest Florida, where I live and work, the trend so far is remarkable.

In the Cape Coral-Fort Myers metropolitan statistical area (MSA)—where I live and Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) is located—the labor force in February 2020 was about 355,000. But by March 2022 it was up to roughly 367,000. Yet the unemployment rate in the same period from the beginning to the end changed little overall—2.6 percent in February 2020 and 2.5

percent in March 2022—though it had risen to a breathtaking 14.1 percent in April of 2020. This means that the local job market absorbed lots of those new labor market entrants from other places. That's good news about the availability of jobs as well as hiring rates. And the nearby Naples-Immokalee-Marco Island MSA experienced a similar pattern over the same time frame: bigger labor force, yet similar unemployment rates both pre- and post-pandemic.

Of course, it's not all good news. As most of us have heard by now, housing costs for families have risen significantly—driven in part by the influx of new Floridians during the pandemic. New data from FGCU's Regional Economic Research Institute (RERI) indicate that single-family home prices in their three-county region (Charlotte, Collier, and Lee) increased by 22-31 percent from May 2021-22. And over on the other South Florida coast, housing costs in general rose by 10.5 percent from April 2021-22 in Miami/Fort Lauderdale, according to the Consumer Price Index.

To see the affordability issue more clearly, it's useful to refer to a number that compares the median home price in an area to the median household income there. Frequently referred to as the PTI (price-to-income ratio), it's calculated as the ratio of the median home prices to median incomes and is thought to give insight into whether home prices are reasonable in light of the incomes earned in that market. According to Freddie Mac, many use 3.5 as a "healthy" PTI: that would mean that the median home prices are about three- and one-half times greater than the median annual income. For example, if a typical family in an

area earns \$75,000, then a reasonable mortgage for that family to undertake would be around \$262,000—3.5 times \$75,000.

But some parts of Florida have PTI ratios that are increasingly frightening.

PTI values for Lee and Collier counties in Southwest Florida, using U.S. Census estimates of median incomes and January home prices, paint a dark portrait of housing "affordability": Lee County's PTI is 6.8, and Collier's is 10.3. That means that in Collier county—home to Naples and Marco Island—the median home price is more than ten times the median income.

Even worse, you would be hard pressed to find many homes with "median" prices in Collier county. Remember, median is simply the number in the middle; it doesn't tell you whether there are many near that price or few. And in Collier County you will likely find many homes well above the median and many below it, but very few other homes in the price range of that median home. As economists like to sometimes say, the distribution of home prices is "bimodal": lots on both ends but very few in between. Which means that those median-income households will be "lucky" to find a home that is 10.5 times their incomes.

Yet even in a pricey market for homes and apartments, there are signs of hope that we can build even more housing, and that we can contain costs as a consequence. Here in Southwest Florida, new single-family building permits rose 28 percent in May 2022 compared to May 2021 in our three-county region. And the number of active listings in the same market rose 84 percent in June 2022 compared to June 2021. Though many housing markets in

Florida have recently experienced skyrocketing housing costs, new home prices, and bidding wars, we finally appear to be getting a bit of breathing room.

It's also great news that vacationers and snowbirds have returned to Florida in numbers that exceed pre-pandemic levels. And while I am not a fan of taxes, per se, sales tax revenues from tourism are indicative of how well we have recovered where tourism is concerned overall. To take just one recent month, state sales taxes from tourism alone came in nearly 20 percent above estimates during April 2022—one of several factors feeding into our state's significant budget surpluses.

And it's not just the tax revenue that matters: The tax revenue from tourism is strong because tourism seems to be stronger than ever. Florida remains a place that people choose—for vacations, for economic opportunities, and for better lives in whatever sense that means to them.

But not everything is smooth sailing: There do seem to be some possible storm clouds ahead. And the one that should be most concerning to all of us is the ongoing threat of inflation. While the Federal Reserve System ("the Fed")—the central bank and exclusive monetary authority of the United States—has recently taken actions indicating that it views inflation as a real and immediate danger, the Fed appears to have waited too long to act, and once it did it wasn't as aggressive as it likely should have been. And while ongoing inflation is always bad because it acts like a very real tax on any money you are presently holding, this particular inflation has been especially brutal for working families since some of

the fastest price increases—gas, shelter, and groceries of all kinds—are on goods and services it's almost impossible to substitute away from: Everyone needs gas, groceries, and a place to live. In addition, those three categories—food, fuel, and shelter—represent the vast majority of a working family's budget every single month.

If we want to see Florida weather this particular inflation well, then we need to continue to work hard to do what we can here to contain costs for working families. Inflation is a national phenomenon, but cities in South Florida—on both sides of the peninsula—continue to experience some of the highest inflation rates in the country, due mostly to rapid increases in housing costs. Anything at all that can be done to reduce local restrictions on land use and zoning ordinances can usher in a wave of new, varied, and affordable housing for families of all kinds.

So be prepared for actual hurricane season. And rest assured that Florida is well prepared for any economic storms ahead. But whether the outlook is uncertain for either the weather or the economy, every reasonable person makes appropriate preparations in advance. And when it comes to economic preparedness, nothing beats a dynamic economy with the flexibility needed to endure both current and future economic storms.

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Real Energy for Change? Provide Something Better!

Dr. Ed Moore

Education reform. Now that is a phrase we have all heard over the decades, maybe to the point of redundancy. When the phrase was used more than three decades ago, it likely referred to curriculum revisions or changes in the instructional requirements in the preparation of teaching personnel. We all recall such

timeless favorites such as Writing to Read, New Math, Hooked on Phonics, and the list is long. My favorite was Writing to Read because it assured me that when my kids got older, they would be as bad a speller as their dad is. Thank goodness for spell-check.

Historically speaking, it has usually been the larger, more structurally focused

changes that have had the greatest effect on advancing education. Changes in curriculum formats and styles have blended in and out through the ages, as have the tools used to convey materials in the classrooms, but the larger, more broadly applied, sociological changes have had the greatest effects on learning in America.

We take for granted the easy access public school systems that are available to every child in the U.S. In some respects, they have become like the fast-food options, the drug stores, and the mattress stores that are ubiquitous and visible to us as we go about our daily business. Once you no longer have children in the schools, they usually just become a part of the neighborhood landscape except when you receive your annual property tax bill and catch a glimpse of that line item. For a brief moment in time, the schools matter, and then your busy life gets in the way. We forget just how important our schools have been in the advancement and development of our modern society and how, over time, they became the necessary ladders to success for everyone, no matter your economic status.

We are now into the fall season and our students are once again back to face-to-face learning. As Florida's schools find students returning to class, more than the bells for the start of the day are ringing. Alarm bells are ringing about a very serious public policy problem; the continuing and increasing shortage of qualified teachers in every classroom. Recent estimates indicate as many as 9,000 classrooms are lacking a certified full time qualified subject matter teacher. We have long struggled to place teachers in complex subjects such as physics, chemistry,

and advanced math, but the problem has grown. This is not just a rural problem. It is a statewide problem. Certainly some of the obstacles and issues might vary, but the net results are the same; not enough teachers and even fewer taking course loads in colleges across our state in preparation for a teaching career. Housing costs in our more urban communities are vastly different than one might find in the more rural counties, but availability might still be an issue. Teachers are leaving the profession in greater numbers for many reasons. This has been a long time coming and, in part, can be attributed to the common discourse about education. We place the blame on the classrooms without thinking through the much larger picture of causations.

I have been engaged in education policy and related issues for more than thirty years. I chaired a state study commission two decades ago on the issues of teachers and the teaching profession. Two decades have not changed the discourse, in fact, it has gotten worse and the recruitment and retention of teachers has now reached a point where the state needs to take a hard look at what changes must be made and how soon. Florida is not alone in this dilemma but, in my view, we have a chance right now to take a national lead in making changes to alter the state of the classrooms across our state.

Changes Over Time

Take the time to go back over the history of public education in America. It has not always been there and for so many it was a very long time coming. Massachusetts, under the persistent efforts of one Horace Mann, began the very first public school

system. He became the very first State Superintendent of Schools and made it his life work to create access for the children of Massachusetts. It took centuries for access to be available for young males from across the economic spectrum alone in the various states. We have seen tremendous changes in access for all children, starting with access for females to all aspects of education in the early 20th Century, and then later—with the passage of Title IX—all races, all national origins, etc. Many Eastern Seaboard cities saw the creation and expansion of parochial systems, at first in reaction to the waves of Irish immigrating in the mid-to late 1800s, and then huge numbers of other European immigrants in the 30 years from 1890-1920. It was not that long ago that poorly directed nationalistic attitudes combined with outright bigotry limited many “white” children from receiving proper instruction. The 1950s and *Brown vs. Board of Education* opened the doors even wider and even with that it took another 15 or more years for schools to be schools, not black or white schools.

All of these sociological changes fell heavily upon the public and parochial school systems to manage. When bricks fall upon a school, the teachers have to lift and carry those bricks. We have asked much of our teaching professionals, all the while being a highly critical society. It is one aspect of our lives where we all form opinions; after all, most all of us spent at least 12 years of our lives experiencing it. However, that does not make us experts. Far from it. My view is that even the so-called experts do not have a true handle on where we go now. We are in a period of the most rapid

changes society has ever seen. I hesitate to write this, but the reality is that students starting college this fall will more than likely be preparing themselves for a workforce filled with jobs that have yet to be created. This is why I cringe when I hear politicians calling for a focus more on specific jobs rather than on the value of learning for learning’s sake. If you are 20 today, you had better be preparing yourself for a lifetime of learning, and the re-creation of who you are and what role you will play in a constantly changing economy.

The sheer volume of knowledge is stunning. In 1945 the whole of knowledge would double every 25 years. It is now estimated that today the volume of knowledge doubles every 12 hours. Read that again. In large part, this has helped to form my opinion that while content knowledge by teachers is critical, it is the modalities of teaching, and the conveyance of the importance of learning new things that will become even more critical over time. We should never lose sight that teaching is not within the toolbox of all of us. I have taught at the undergraduate and graduate levels. It is a challenge that took a great deal of effort to be even a little bit good at it. Imagine teaching eighth grade, with all those various energies and competencies, and facing six periods a day with 22 kids in each class. Imagine not only teaching these 132 highly diversified (in every way imaginable) children but also dealing with parents, administrators, policymakers, and at the end of it all providing grading and feedback to those cherished 132 souls. It is a challenge and yet we wonder why so few choose it as a profession.

I wrote a study-piece about five years

ago that was designed to try to awaken policy makers to a coming crisis in education. At that time, I headed an organization of 30 colleges and universities, with 21 of those offering degrees in education. We saw a precipitous drop in the number of students earning degrees in education during the years from 2010 to 2018. If we are not producing new teachers, we cannot replace the sheer numbers who leave the profession each year, a pace which has only accelerated. Why be surprised when recruitment efforts fail, especially when you know a huge number of certified teachers in Florida classrooms already are coming here from other states, having earned their degrees from non-Florida colleges and universities.

Florida has tried different ways to create new teachers. Every community or state college created mechanisms for offering programs at each site they manage with the intention of creating greater outputs and offering shorter pathways to teacher certifications. Go ahead and check out how many still are in place and how successful each has been in meeting the local county demand for teachers. We have used all kinds of alternative track methods for converting people with subject matter expertise into teachers, and yet we are around 9,000 short this fall semester. That number is going to get worse unless it becomes a public policy priority for Florida. The study I chaired 20 years ago found a multitude of reasons for why teachers left the profession. Those issues have grown in number and as our society becomes more complex, more divisive, and more resistant to change we must find ways to be more creative, more open to new ideas and more focused on doing what

is best for our students.

We have been creative in developing new modalities, new venues, and new kinds of structures. When once we only saw public schools, private schools and parochial schools, we now have all kinds of mixes and options. As high-speed internet connectivity expands and the ability to reach every household with adequate online capacity grows, our options will also grow.

This is a national challenge, but it is a great opportunity for Florida to step up and seek workable solutions. We need the best instruction now if we want to be the best tomorrow. We need it in every school and every classroom in our state. We also need to find out why we are losing our teacher talent and our teacher pipeline. We know we have a shortfall, in large part due to losing three out of five teachers within five years of them entering a classroom.

Five Immediate Challenges For Florida's Education Systems

There are five critical challenges beyond the immediate need of finding better ways to both recruit and retain teachers. This will take a singular concerted effort before we even jump to the other five huge challenges. One thing we know is that creating learning organizations out of public policy making entities, such as legislatures, will also take a huge change in retention of prior actions and efforts. Term limits have exacerbated this problem. Pulling together old actors in the processes who have been there and done that, and combining them with new creative thinkers, might help in these change efforts as we move forward. Here are a few places to start:

Expanding choice and competition are two keys to updating Florida's education system of schools, colleges and universities. Choice gives students and families needed options to boost their education and capacities to meet the demands of the future. Competition gives students, families and the State help in lowering education costs. Choice and competition, if nothing else, break old habits and boost new, more creative designs.

Many state, independent, and private colleges and universities have already begun this work. Many have researched, tested, adjusted and demonstrated choice and competition models. These existing models should be inventoried, assessed and where possible replicated in lower performing areas of the state. Some talk as if choice is something new for Florida. It is interesting to note that the state provided a grant program for students attending Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF) schools, now called EASE but previously called FRAG, which is now in its 44th year of existence. It has helped give students enhanced choice options upon graduating from Florida high schools. Oddly, this past legislature chose to reduce this choice option. There are many on the national level pushing for public dollars spent in education at all levels to simply follow the students. Families make choices. Those choosing non-public options continue to support public options through taxes. The concept here is, to truly allow and advance choice, one must treat all students, families and institutions meeting public needs the same.

Career counseling is in need of expansion. Technology is transforming education

and the workplace. Technology will likely eliminate a significant number of today's jobs in upcoming years. Census estimates predict that Florida will welcome more than four million new residents by 2030. These two anticipated changes will trigger massive retraining and educational assignments for our schools. There are on-site and online courses and degree or certificate programs, offering career pathways that current and future students can choose. Our higher education institutions are increasingly competing to enroll both traditional and working adult students. We will gain more efficiencies in using these new tools if we begin to think of alternatives to the traditional school agrarian calendars with students tied to classroom seats, and funding models needing changes, since our current models fund schools based on how it has been done, but not necessarily on how it could be done.

What is not abundant is counseling to help Floridians decode their options and make their best choices. Florida's students are making career and college decisions right now. We know they will likely have several different careers as they age, but starting them out on a clear path should be more effective. This includes revising what it means to be a teacher, how we recruit and retain teachers, and how to make the teaching profession an attractive career path for middle and high school students of today. Adults in the workforce are returning to colleges and universities to retrain and complete their degree work. Wrong decisions waste student, school, college and university, and taxpayer resources. A statewide campaign to equip counselors and coaches

to help every motivated Floridian choose their educational or retraining pathway is essential. A statewide education and career counseling work group of education, employer, community, and foundation leaders can focus on expanding what can be done.

High School Credits, Skills; Workplace Lessons

American schools have always been about a foundation education, going back to the One-Room School House. That foundation has expanded over the years from “Reading, Writing, Arithmetic” to completing 8th grade as a goal, to earning a high school diploma. It has changed again. A high school diploma will be an insufficient foundation for careers in the future. It will mean a lifetime of dependency, costly government programs and even possibly incarceration. Florida should not allow students to drop out until they have completed a workplace skills certificate or program that can lead to their employment. CareerSource Florida and the Department of Economic Opportunity could assist with a design. School performance reports should count these completers as positive workforce completers who will someday choose to advance their education further.

Every high school student should complete a workplace foundation program. Currently in high schools, there are numbers of college academic preparation programs such as dual enrollment and advanced placement. These college-bound students are on pathways to postsecondary education. However, those on career tracks also need firm academic foundation skills. Every high school student must already

take an online education course. Every high school student should also take a high-skill certificate or other workplace experience course before they earn their diploma or can leave high school before age 18. These are new, essential foundation skills for the future. An expanded menu of choices for all high school students should include industry certification, apprenticeships, internships, and other employment/workplace training and experiences that could lead to a job upon graduation or at the age of 18. Keeping young Floridians in high schools to choose and develop workplace skills will chart a pathway to employment. For students heading to postsecondary degrees, it will provide employability insurance and resume enhancement.

Swift Pathways To Certificates And Degrees

Former President William D. Law, Jr., of St. Petersburg College, testified to the Senate Education Committee many years ago that a college’s performance measurement standards are Direction and Velocity. What is a student’s destination? How fast are they going to get there? His equation is correct but there is a third critical performance measurement: “Fuel.” Students must assemble and contribute the resources, energy and resolve to complete their postsecondary education. This equation is a framework for moving students as swiftly as possible from schools to colleges to careers. As Florida’s population of traditional and working adult students grows, the usual and customary alternative would be to build and expand more campuses, buildings and classrooms at Florida’s public and independent colleges

and universities. Those campuses are already among the largest in the nation and are not reachable by many students. There are low-cost actions to boost completions. They focus on choice and competition among colleges and universities, focused on direction, velocity and fuel.

(Direction + Velocity) + Fuel = Completions

Florida is far ahead of nearly every other state, focusing on direction, velocity and fuel. For decades, Florida has had 2+2 articulation agreements to speed associate's degree completers to bachelor's degree programs at state and independent colleges and universities. Florida's Articulation Coordinating Committee is a longstanding collaboration of public, independent and private colleges and universities that promote tools such as the state's common course or course equivalency numbering system.

Many thousands of high school students are currently sampling college courses in high school through dual enrollment, advanced placement and other such programs. Florida can affordably do more.

Targeted Degrees—Targeted degree production has been a priority for decades. Educators have tested many different approaches, focusing on costly inducements to students, colleges, universities and employers or slackening regulator impairments. Employers that know their talent needs work with educators. Educators design customized curriculums to meet those local needs. Employers and educators work with students, preparing and placing them in the targeted local jobs.

Other Inducements

There could also be student, college and university performance inducements that reward students who complete their degrees swiftly. There are currently disincentives for slow-moving students. The Effective Access to Student Education Grant (EASE; formerly known as FRAG) ceases to exist for each student after nine semesters. A student earning excess credit hours at the State University System has higher tuition costs. An inducement idea to accelerate student time-to-degree and cut excess credits-to-degree adopted for Bright Futures may be on the right track. Florida should consider student financial inducements to attend summer sessions or take online courses during the summer, discount tuition costs for early morning or Friday classes, establish Carry-Forward-Your-Scholarship Bonuses to pay graduate school tuitions or pay off student loans, and give registration advantages to "Fast-Track" students and bonuses to "Fast-Track" completers. Additional "Carrot & Stick" inducements could move both students and institutions to speed up.

What We Need

If Florida identifies critical need occupations there should be alternative ways of paying tuition costs for students choosing these professions. If we need teachers, then take steps to ease the financial burdens of becoming one. The same holds true for Bachelors in Nursing or other allied health fields. At the graduate levels, we have made it impossible for students to become doctors without incurring huge debt loads, then we expect them to retire this huge debt over ten or 20 years. Then we bemoan the reality that students finishing medical school are

now opting out of pursuing advanced specialties because the costs of both tuition and deferred income possibilities are too large. We need to better target societal needs and figure out how to entice students into choosing careers that meet those needs. We need to start with a focused effort at the teaching profession!

We will need at least a chunk of tomorrow's best and brightest to choose to share their talents, energies, and knowledge with my grandkids and all of Florida's kids. Our

future depends upon it. I wish all those who have already chosen this path and are making teaching both their profession and career all the best in this coming year. When the morning bells ring this year, we also need to recognize the alarm bells are ringing, too. How we respond will determine who we are as a society tomorrow.

Dr. Ed Moore is a long-time public servant, partner in All Things Florida Consulting, and ICUF President Emeritus.



From the White House to the White Sands

Brian Blase

It's not easy to move a family with five kids. But, in January 2021, that's what my wife and I did. We moved from Fairfax County—a large county in Virginia, just west of the nation's capital—to Ponte Vedra Beach, a beautiful coastal community in northeast Florida. The response of our local government and schools to the pandemic was so extreme and anti-family that we

made the decision to uproot our lives and move where freedom and children are more highly valued.

A bit of background: my wife and I moved to Fairfax County right after we got married in the summer of 2004. We lived there for 16 years before we made the decision to move.

In retrospect, there were a lot of reasons

to move to Florida: no cold weather, no state income taxes, and a closer proximity to the beach. And those reasons would have made such a move worthwhile regardless of the pandemic.

Without the pandemic though, we never would have thought about moving. We had a great community with good friends, and our kids liked their schools and sports teams. And I thought it made sense for me to be near Washington since my career is focused on public policy. I've had the pleasure of serving at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, the U.S. Senate Republican Policy Committee, and ultimately with President Trump as Special Assistant to the President for Economic Policy at the National Economic Council.

At first, the pandemic didn't change our attitude toward our community. We felt like we were all in it together. All areas of the country were understandably concerned about the novel virus and seemed to be taking proper precautions at the time. And while the shuttering of schools and activities for our children was horrible for them and us, at least we could understand it.

However, some people like us were doing honest assessments and looking holistically at the benefits and costs of lockdowns—and considering everything that matters in life. It took only a few months to realize that the government response by locking kids in homes was a mistake. The harm to kids and young adults from being locked down was far greater than the societal benefit from doing so. In our town of Reston, the authorities padlocked tennis

courts for months, shut down public outdoor swimming pools, and put yellow police tape on the playground equipment at public parks.

What we found the most intolerable was the closure of the public schools. Again, we understood these actions for the first few months of the pandemic. But the data became clear about a few critical aspects: 1) the extremely low risk faced by kids to the virus, particularly those without any underlying medical issues, 2) the harms to kids from social isolation, and 3) the profound lack of learning in that accompanied virtual school options for many students. Once those realities became apparent, all efforts should have been made to open schools and get kids back to normal activities and socialization. Instead, fear continued to rain down on children. Kids no longer played outside with their friends and turned to endless hours on electronic devices to pass the time.

In the summer of 2020, Fairfax County's superintendent sent a survey to parents with two options—participate in virtual education only or utilize a hybrid arrangement with a few days a week in the school. We chose the latter. It wasn't an ideal choice for my wife and me because we thought kids should be going back full-time. Plus, our kids wanted to get back to school. Virtual school was a nightmare for them because they learned next to nothing and lost touch with friends and peers.

About half of parents chose the virtual option and about half the hybrid option. It turns out the parents' choices were to be disregarded. A few days after the survey closed, the superintendent announced that



the schools would be closed to start the school year. The teachers' unions were too powerful, and the school system caved to paranoia and fear, listening only to public health experts who were relying on flawed models and who lacked perspective.

After the superintendent's announcement, we began to consider moving to a more hospitable and rational part of the country. My family was more fortunate than most because moving was an option. When I had left my job at the White House in the summer of 2019, I had started my own policy organization. While most of my work centered on federal policymaking, it was not necessary for me to live in Washington for my business.

As we explored options, we listed a few priorities to help us decide where to move:

it had to be freer (the lack of a state income tax was a good indication of more freedom), it had to be warmer, the schools had to be good, and the neighborhood had to have an abundance of young families with children.

I put three states on my list: Florida, Tennessee, and Texas. In September 2020, my wife and I flew to Florida to check out the area between Jacksonville and St. Augustine. Everyone we met was friendly, and many people had made the move from northeastern states over the past few years. They had moved to not only enjoy the warmer weather, but also to escape the increasingly progressive and woke nature of their states, which made raising children so difficult. Not a single person we met told us that they regretted their move. It honestly seemed too good to be true but confirmed

to us that we should move.

Our oldest child was just starting eighth grade, and we wanted to move before he started high school. We did desire to move as soon as possible to get our kids back into school.

During the summer that year, we asked our rising 8th grader, 6th grader, and 3rd grader whether they wanted to continue with virtual learning through their school or for us to homeschool them. Since my wife and I knew that they were learning little through virtual school, we leaned toward homeschooling even though that meant we would need to develop a curriculum and vet and purchase materials. Our 6th and 3rd graders chose homeschooling.

Although there were often tears and “gnashing of teeth,” we did our best and they learned. Homeschooling was hard, but it was better than virtual school. A benefit of homeschooling is that parents can cover so much more material than a regular school does, and we were able to do interesting projects with our kids.

Our then 8th grader had chosen virtual learning but, only two months later, he told us that he was utterly frustrated and learning nothing. We withdrew him and homeschooled him, as well. Fortunately, we were able to find a preschool at a local church that was open for our younger children, so they were able to escape our home for a few hours a day. We remain grateful for that. It was crucial to have a few hours a day without the younger children, so we could focus on the education for the older kids. Oh, and during this time, like parents all over the country, we had our normal jobs to do too.

In early November, we bought a home

in Ponte Vedra and during the first week of January, we finally made the move from Virginia to Florida. It was difficult to pack up our house in Reston, but it was even more difficult for us to say goodbye to our friends and leave our community. On the other hand, we were excited for the adventure and to leave the lockdowns of Northern Virginia. We only get one life, and it’s important to make changes from time to time. We looked forward to meeting new people, developing another loving community, and enjoying the outdoors the whole year.

A few days after our move to our new home, a yellow bus came down our street and picked up our kids for school. After ten long months since they were last in a school building, my wife and I cried as the bus pulled away.

The political leadership in Florida—for which Governor DeSantis deserves enormous credit—insisted that schools be open for the 2020-2021 school year. Florida prioritized kids and families, properly following the science and balancing the totality of considerations in life. Young families and kids in Florida were spared from so much scarring, including social isolation and loss of learning, that millions of other families and kids from across the country were forced to endure.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, about 1,060,000 people moved from one state to another between the summer of 2020 and the summer of 2021. Of this group, Florida gained 220,000 more people than it lost. California and New York—two of the states with the most severe lockdowns—each had more than 350,000 people, on net, move to other states that year.

We've met many other families who endured the same trauma and turmoil as ours in locked down parts of the country and made the decision to relocate to this community because the local governments of their former homes had failed them. I recognize how lucky we were to have the ability and resources to do so.

This part of Florida is a great place to live. It's beautiful, with water everywhere and great weather. The schools are good, there are many amenities designed for families, and the people are kind and welcoming. While the pandemic was horrible, the

negative consequences of the government response to it in many parts of the country were just as bad if not worse than the virus itself. Like many others, we voted with our feet and moved to a place where the government response was sensible. We are thankful that we had Florida to move to.

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Fighting Illegal Trade Requires Greater Collaboration

Chad Wolf

For many Americans, illicit trade and transnational crime are the stuff of Hollywood movies or the latest mini-series on their favorite streaming platform. But the reality is that illicit trade is impacting the economy and safety of communities in Florida and around the country.

The massive scope of these crimes and the criminal networks that operate them can make them particularly difficult to combat, but a comprehensive approach that includes public policy, law enforcement and the private sector can put a sizeable dent in their operations.

Organized Retail Crime Threatening Communities

One of the most visible ways Americans are seeing the regrettable growth in illicit trade is through the growth in organized retail crime. Organized retail crime is the large-scale theft of retail goods for the purpose of reselling the items for profit. For criminals, this has become an increasingly popular activity because the stakes can be relatively low, and the profits can be incredibly high.

If caught, many involved in organized retail crime may face nothing more than a misdemeanor charge of shoplifting. In many jurisdictions, prosecutors may not charge them at all. In addition, the growth of internet sales platforms has made it easier than ever to sell stolen goods online.

A Florida Retail Federation Survey in 2021 showed that [69 percent of their members](#) had seen an increase in organized retail crime over the course of the year, and this activity impacts retailers of all shapes and sizes. In August, three masked men suddenly began [smashing jewelry cases](#) at a store in a Tampa shopping mall, scaring shoppers and fleeing with roughly \$100,000 in stolen goods. At the same time, drug stores around the country have responded to surges in shoplifting by [putting products](#) like deodorant, toothpaste and laundry detergent under lock and key. Ironically, the impact of making retail shopping less convenient is that more shoppers are likely to start buying these products online.

The sale of illegal or counterfeit goods hurts taxpayers as well. In 2021, retail thefts in Florida alone totaled \$4.5 billion and [cost state taxpayers more than \\$427 million](#)

in state and local taxes. That's less funding for local initiatives like schools, roads and even law enforcement.

Pandemic Fueled Rise in Illegal Trade, But Provided a Framework to Fight It

The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing supply chain shortages exacerbated the problem of illegal trade, but it also may have provided us with the best path to fighting it. The pandemic led to a spike in demand for medical supplies like N95 respirator masks and personal protective equipment (PPE). When suppliers could not meet demand, criminals and counterfeiters swooped in to sell fraudulent products, including medicines and pharmaceuticals.

As Secretary of Homeland Security at the time, I saw criminals making illegal profits and America's first responders and patients being put at risk. In response, DHS published the first of its kind report, "Combating Trafficking in Counterfeit and Pirated Goods." The report outlined the steps the government and private sector could take to combat these practices. Then, we acted.

To prioritize these efforts, the Department of Homeland Security launched Operation Stolen Promise. This operation brought together law enforcement and private sector partners to identify and shut down the financial fraud, counterfeiting and online scams that were thriving during the pandemic.

In its first year alone, Operation Stolen Promise [led to the seizure](#) of more than \$48 million in illicit profits, and the capture of more than 2,000 fraudulent shipments of medical supplies, including 21.2 million

counterfeit respirator masks. The success of the operation led to the launching of Operation Stolen Promise 2.0, which has been focused on countering the threat of fraudulent vaccines and medical treatments. In total, the [operations have led](#) to 362 arrests, more than 3,100 seizures and the analysis of more than 84,000 COVID-19 related websites.

Operation Stolen Promise was a comprehensive strategy built on four pillars.

- **Partnership.** DHS began building new partnerships and leveraging existing relationships with law enforcement and the private sector. This included coordinating activities with other federal agencies and engaging with foreign law enforcement and customs officials. It also included engaging with experts at the companies and financial institutions who can help better identify fraudulent products and the channels through which they were being sold.
- **Investigation.** Illicit trade frequently crosses borders and jurisdictions, so it is critical that law enforcement is organizing its investigative efforts. Utilizing actionable intelligence gained through its partnerships, Operation Stolen Promise helped ensure that the appropriate federal agencies were leading investigations into illicit activities including global trade, cybercrime, and financial fraud.
- **Disruption.** Once investigated, authorities moved quickly to dismantle these criminal networks and arrest the people

responsible for them. This included seizing counterfeit medical supplies or pharmaceuticals and taking down the illicit websites and other online marketplaces where they were being sold.

- **Education.** Educating the public on how to avoid fraudulent products and illicit networks was a key goal of Operation Stolen Promise. Criminals were working to make their products look as authentic as possible, so authorities worked to provide the public with tools to better spot the red flags associated with counterfeit goods. These education efforts included close coordination with private sector partners whose expertise and reach could help further expand the campaign.

The primary lesson of Operation Stolen Promise is that there is no substitute for close coordination and partnerships between the public and private sectors at the local, state, national and global level. Now, we must take those lessons and work to apply them more broadly.

For policymakers, this means taking the growth of illicit trade seriously and developing laws that will better protect consumers and retailers. Last summer, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed a bill into law that would [impose stiffer penalties](#) on criminals found to have stolen a large number of products over a short period of time. The bill was championed by Florida retailers and law enforcement and will provide an effective new tool to discourage organized retail crime. Other states are looking at similar approaches.

Overseas Origins of Illegal Trade

Combatting illegal trade also means looking abroad. The income generated from illegal trade is commonly used to fund terrorist networks and dangerous cartels. To go after these networks, we must go after their funding both in the United States and abroad. The illicit tobacco trade is one important place to start.

Illicit tobacco is a popular product with criminals for the same reason as organized retail crime. It's a low risk, high reward proposition. Authorities and the general public aren't focused on illegal cigarettes, making it unlikely a smuggler will get caught. Even if they do, the penalties aren't particularly harsh, while the profits are significant.

It can cost as little as 20 cents to manufacture a counterfeit pack of cigarettes overseas that may sell for as much as \$5 to \$10 in the black market. This means that a single cargo container of illegal cigarettes could cost just \$100,000 to produce but ultimately be worth \$2.3 million once it gets to the streets. In total, it is estimated that one out of five cigarettes purchased in the United States is illicit, costing taxpayers nearly \$7 billion in revenues annually.

An important way to help end to this illicit activity would be to build a more comprehensive, multilateral approach between foreign governments and law enforcement to fight corruption and criminal misuse at international ports and Free Trade Zones. FTZs serve an important function in ensuring that global commerce can move efficiently and cost effectively. But the same policies that make them attractive to businesses also make them attractive to criminals.

An FTZ along the border of Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil is estimated to have [6 billion illicit cigarettes](#) running through it every year. It is widely believed that a primary beneficiary of this illicit trade is Hezbollah, which has a strong presence in the area.

Unfortunately, corruption is rampant in this region and often comes from the highest levels of the government. Last summer, the United States [placed](#) former Paraguayan President Horacio Cartes on a corruption list for obstructing a "major international investigation into transnational crime." It is thought that Cartes, a cigarette magnate, [was laundering](#) millions of dollars in illicit tobacco sales.

Similar issues are plaguing FTZs around the globe. Dubai's FTZ has become a hub of cigarette smuggling, benefitting groups like the Taliban, al-Qaeda and Hezbollah. In Cambodia, FTZs are helping criminal networks trade in illicit tobacco, with these same networks linked to child labor.

The illicit tobacco trade abroad impacts us here in the United States as well. In 2020, the Department of Homeland Security made the single largest seizure of illegal cigarettes ever recorded in the United States, estimated to be worth \$88 million. The seizure occurred in McAllen, Texas, but it's known that FTZs played a role in moving the illegal cigarettes from the UAE and Panama into the United States.

Sophisticated Criminals Require Comprehensive Response

From corner drug stores to free trade zones, criminal and terrorist networks are taking a highly sophisticated approach to illegal trade. Likewise, our response must be equally sophisticated. That begins by seizing on the lessons learned from Operation Stolen Promise and establishing meaningful public-private partnerships that can share intelligence and investigate leads. It also means training law enforcement to better recognize signs of illicit trade and educating the public on how to avoid illicit products.

Illicit trade networks prey upon any gap in the economic system. By working together, we can close those gaps and leave these criminals with little room to hide.

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Florida is the Model for Election Integrity

J. Christian Adams

The 2020 election was full of chaos and irregularities. States like Pennsylvania took days to finalize election results. Other states, like Wisconsin, had ballot harvesting scandals at nursing homes. Michigan blocked poll watchers from observing officials counting the vote. These delays and scandals caused many

doubts and questions about the vote count to arise.

A bright light in all the darkness was Florida. Unlike almost every other battleground state, Florida had its election results in early on election night. The Sunshine State was free of many of the scandals that plagued the rest of the country.

Since the 2020 election, Governor DeSantis has taken action to strengthen election integrity in Florida even more. The state is leading the way on election reforms and serving as a model for other states.

Throughout the country, election crimes are not being prosecuted. Many prosecutors lack the expertise and resources to prosecute these cases. Florida was no different.

Through public records requests, the Public Interest Legal Foundation, of which I am the president, discovered [156 election crime referrals](#) from nine county supervisors of elections in Florida. Not even one of these was prosecuted. Hillsborough County (Tampa), even informed us of their policy to not alert prosecutors to potential election violations.

There is no deterrence in a system where criminals know they will not be prosecuted. Governor DeSantis recognized this. He proposed that Florida create an investigatory and prosecutorial unit dedicated solely to election crimes. His proposal was passed into law earlier this year.

This will allow for election crimes, from double voting to foreign citizens voting, to be investigated and prosecuted. This is essential to election integrity. Voters deserve to know that people breaking election laws and committing fraud will face consequences.

Other states across the country need to implement similar election crime units.

While Florida is leading the way in significant election integrity reforms, there is still work the state needs to do. Specifically, the state needs to clean its voter rolls to include only eligible Florida registrants.

As of this year, Florida has over 20,000 deceased registrants on its voter rolls. The presence of deceased registrants on voter rolls becomes particularly alarming as vote by mail expands. You do not want someone other than the intended person receiving a deceased individual's ballot.

Another nearly 100,000 Floridians are simultaneously registered to vote in Florida and in another state. For instance, an individual has a winter home in Florida and another residence in Michigan. The individual is registered to vote in both states. This is problematic because that means the individual could improperly vote in both states.

It is essential that voter rolls are accurate and up to date. They are the most important election documents because they determine who is eligible to vote.

Overall, Florida may still have some work to do to improve election integrity, but it is leading the way in cutting edge election reforms. The other 49 states should enact election integrity laws similar to Florida's.

The 2022 elections will be more secure than 2020, but there is still important work that needs to be done.

J. Christian Adams is the president of the Public Interest Legal Foundation, a former Justice Department attorney, and the current commissioner on the United States Commission on Civil Rights.



“Taxation by Citation” Needs to End in Florida

Vittorio Nastasi

Across the country, state and local governments use court fines and fees as a source of revenue to fund public services. Individuals may be charged fines and fees for any criminal or civil infraction, but outstanding court debts overwhelmingly stem from traffic citations. This

“taxation by citation” is not only a threat to individual liberty, but can also undermine public safety and result in fiscal instability.

While fines and fees are often discussed in tandem, their purposes and legal implications differ. Fines are imposed upon conviction and are primarily intended to

deter and punish crimes or municipal code violations. They are usually set in statute and vary depending on the severity of an offense. Fines are appropriate and beneficial when used as an intermediate form of punishment in place of incarceration.¹ However, fines are commonly used in addition to incarceration, rather than being an alternative.

Fees, on the other hand, are solely intended to raise revenue. They essentially shift the costs of the justice system away from taxpayers and onto defendants. These “user fees” are imposed by state and local governments to charge individuals for the cost of their constitutional right to due process. Various court fees add to—and often exceed—the initial fine charged for an offense. Common examples of fees include court-appointed attorney fees, supervision fees, administrative fees, jury fees, and drug testing fees. When individuals are unable to pay fees in a timely manner, they can face additional “poverty fees” in the form of late fees, collection fees, and payment plan fees.²

Typically, revenue derived from fines and fees is used to fund court operations, including salary and personnel costs. However, some governments rely on courts to generate revenue for other services as well. In some cases, the revenue is earmarked for a specific purpose related to traffic safety or law enforcement. In others, it goes to a government’s general fund or to purposes wholly unrelated to the justice system.

In the case of traffic tickets in Florida, most of the revenue generated stays with the local government that issued the citation. Some of the money is also distributed to the state for general revenue and a variety of

state trust funds and programs, including:

- Emergency Medical Services
- Brain and Spinal Cord Rehabilitation
- Florida Endowment for Vocational Rehabilitation
- Child Welfare Training
- Juvenile Justice
- Foster Care Citizen Review Panel
- State Criminal Justice Programs³

While funding for the state court system is constitutionally required to come from state revenues appropriated by general law, a large share of funding for the state’s clerks of courts is provided by filing fees, service charges, and court costs that are collected from individuals when they interact with the court system. Consequently, the clerks of courts in Florida get much of their revenue from traffic enforcement.

There are two main problems with using fines and fees for government revenue: (1) they impose disproportionate burdens on low-income individuals and (2) they are not a stable or reliable source of revenue.

Fines and Fees Disproportionately Harm Low-Income People

Because fines and fees are generally not scaled according to an individual’s income or ability to pay, they tend to disproportionately burden lower-income people. For lower-income individuals, even relatively small legal expenses can turn into insurmountable financial burdens. Approximately four in 10 American adults report that they could not cover an emergency expense of \$400 given their current financial situation.⁴

When people are unable to pay their court debts, the consequences can be severe. Failure to pay outstanding fines and fees can result in driver's license suspensions and even incarceration. Such penalties make it even more difficult for individuals to pay off their debts, reduce access to housing and employment, and create additional administrative costs for governments.

More than half of states suspend, revoke, or refuse to renew an individual's driver's license because of unpaid court debt from fines, fees, drug offenses, or other legal costs.⁵ A recent report found that nearly two million Floridians are unable to drive because of unpaid fines and fees.⁶ Considering that approximately 80 percent of Floridians drive themselves to work⁷ and many jobs require⁸ a driver's license, license suspension as a consequence for failure to pay fines and fees would appear to be counterproductive.

Without a license, indebted individuals are made even less able to pay off their court debts. For example, one study of New Jersey drivers found that 42 percent of people whose driver's licenses were suspended lost their job within six months of the suspension, and nearly half were unable to get new employment during the time their license was suspended.⁹ Of those who could find another job, 88 percent reported a decrease in income.¹⁰

According to the federal National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, at least 75 percent of individuals with suspended licenses continue to drive, risking being pulled over and facing additional fines, extended periods of suspension, or even mandatory incarceration.¹¹ And driving on

a suspended license isn't the only way that fines and fees can undermine public safety—a survey of 1,000 Alabama residents found that “one in five people whose only previous offenses were traffic violations admitted to committing more serious offenses, including felonies, to pay off their traffic tickets.”¹²

Many states also use the threat of parole or probation revocation or incarceration to incentivize payment of court debts.¹³ While incarcerated, individuals can rack up even more debt through “pay to stay fees” that essentially charge inmates for room and board during their incarceration. Nearly all states allow prisons and jails to charge these fees, which can be as high as \$140 a day.

The evidence is overwhelming: even relatively small fines and fees can send low-income individuals spiraling. Failure to pay an initial penalty for a minor traffic infraction can result in license suspensions, incarceration, and even more debt. This has negative consequences for public safety, family ties, and the economy.

Fines and Fees Are Not a Reliable Source of Revenue

While some governments are heavily financially dependent on fines and fees, there are several reasons to believe that they are not reliable sources of revenue. For example, fines and fees revenue can vary considerably, depending on the frequency of violations, enforcement, and the ability of governments to collect assessed fines and fees.

In Florida, statewide fines and fees revenue has declined significantly over recent years—a fiscal issue that has been

exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Courthouses were shuttered during the early months of the pandemic, leading to a substantial backlog of cases and disrupted revenue flows. Over that same period, lockdowns and stay-at-home orders kept drivers off the road, reducing the number of traffic violations overall.

In the fiscal year ending in September 2020, clerks of courts collected \$377.4 million in fines and fees compared to \$432 million in the year prior. Revenues in both years represent a dramatic decline from the \$539 million collected in 2009.

Declining fines and fees revenue is creating budget holes for the state. According to Sen. Jeff Brandes, the shortfall could be as large as \$50 million in general revenues.¹⁴ The problem is already causing trouble for organizations and programs that depend on fines and fees revenue—those include Epilepsy Florida, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and Miami-Dade & The Florida Keys Crime Stoppers. Epilepsy Florida, for example, pulls in \$5 from every seatbelt infraction in the state. In 2020, that translated to just \$240,000 compared to a whopping \$1.1 million in 2014.¹⁵

Aside from the variability in violations and case processing, governments are notoriously bad at collecting outstanding debts. A recent report from the Brennan Center for Justice found that only 36 percent of the fines and fees assessed in Florida between 2012 and 2018 were actually collected, resulting in over \$1.13 billion in cumulative unpaid fines and fees.¹⁶ The same report found that high costs of collection make fines and fees a highly inefficient way to generate revenue. For example, counties in

Texas and New Mexico spend more than 41 cents for every dollar of revenue raised from fines and fees on in-court hearings and jail costs. One New Mexico county, Bernalillo County, actually loses money—spending approximately \$1.17 for every dollar collected.

Options for Reform

There are several reforms that would reduce the negative impacts of fines and fees in Florida. Ideally, the state's court system would be fully funded through general revenues and user fees would be totally eliminated. However, the Florida Constitution requires the clerks of courts to be funded through fees. This constitutional constraint represents a significant barrier to reform, but it is one worth working to overcome. Generally speaking, no program or agency should be specifically funded by fines and fees revenue. Instead, court revenue should be sent into the general fund to avoid poor incentive structures within the justice system.

Judges also have little discretion when it comes to charging fees because most are required by statute. Here, the legislature has some agency to reduce or eliminate fees that do not directly fund the clerks of courts.

In the case of fines, the legislature has more immediate opportunity to engage in reform. In general, reforms should focus on developing standardized tools to determine each individual's ability to pay and scale fines accordingly. Establishing standard practices would ensure that individuals are treated equally under the law. Scaling fines according to an individual's ability to pay would also reduce the administrative

costs associated with pursuing uncollectable debts. The system of “day fines” or “income-based fines” used in many European countries provides an interesting model.¹⁷ Essentially, income-based fines scale fines according to an individual’s income. As a result, fines have the same relative impact on each individual, regardless of income. Research shows that income-based fines can actually increase the amount of revenue generated by fines.¹⁸

Other—perhaps milder—reform options include eliminating fines and fees in juvenile cases and ceasing driver’s license suspensions as a consequence for failure to pay. Such reforms would focus on the most vulnerable populations and avoid one of the most detrimental outcomes associated with court debt.

Finally, the state of Florida should collect and publish more reliable and comprehensive data on fines and fees collection. At a minimum, this would include:

- The amount of fines and fees levied annually;
- The revenue generated by fines and fees;
- How fines and fees revenue is allocated; and
- The costs associated with collection.

Conclusion

The primary responsibilities of the legal system are to promote public safety and to provide for justice. Pressure to raise revenue, at best, undermines—and at worst, directly conflicts with—those responsibilities.

When incentives are misaligned, police departments and court systems become more concerned with “taxation by citation” than carrying out their core functions. Such conflicts of interest also serve to undermine the legitimacy of the justice system among the public.

The use of fines and fees can have devastating consequences for low-income people and results in fiscal instability for governments. Florida lawmakers would be wise to avoid these problems by pursuing reforms that reduce state and local dependence on fines and fees revenue.

Vittorio Nastasi is the director of criminal justice policy at The Reason Foundation.

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Micro-school pioneer: If I can do it, so can you

Ron Matus

EDITOR'S NOTE: Earlier this year, The James Madison Institute had the opportunity to do in-school civics programs for two innovative micro-schools started by education entrepreneur Jaime Manfra. Soon thereafter, our friend Ron Matus at Step Up for Students featured Manfra in this article, which originally appeared at reimaginED.

Service Learning Micro-school is a private K-12 school with a foundation firmly rooted in service to humanity, steered by goals such as the elimination of prejudice, economic justice, equality of men and women, balance of science and religion,

individual investigation of the truth, oneness of humanity and unity in diversity.

CLEARWATER, Fla.—Before all the buzz about learning pods and micro-schools, some folks were already creating learning pods and micro-schools.



Jaime Manfra went down this path 10 years ago.

Her Service Learning Micro-school (SLS) is all about flexibility, diversity, and community service. Students here spend a lot of time helping others, whether it's making sandwiches for the homeless, volunteering at a horse rescue, or playing balloon volleyball with residents at the assisted living facility next door.

"Service is love in action, it's virtue in action," Manfra said. Students "need concrete ways of applying kindness."

SLS isn't for everybody. But with education choice, it shows what's possible for everybody. Options that can be created and customized. For and by families and educators. To address whatever needs they feel are paramount.

To be sure, hurdles remain. SLS, for example, wrestled for years with finding a good facility. But policies to maximize flexibility for families and educators continue to get traction.

As they do, more problem-solvers like Manfra will find a way.

SLS began as a pod in 2012.

Manfra's son Ajay turned out to be too much of a square peg for public school. So Manfra, who once taught classes in natural medicine, began homeschooling Ajay & a handful of other students.

Teacher-created activities demonstrate the inspiration a teacher feels, sparked by the students they work with. These adaptable lessons are balanced with the Edgenuity online school platform, which allows for measurable progress available to parents. Homework is optional and students are encouraged to spend after school hours with their families and friends, pursuing sports or other interests.

Word spread. The pod grew.

Now SLS has 44 students in K-12, most in middle & high.

All but two use school choice scholarships.

About 75 percent attended public schools. Many left because of peer pressure and bullying. Others left because of an academic environment their parents described as stifling.

At SLS, they found smaller classes, a competency-based approach, and far less pressure.

"I don't see my children suffering anymore," said Soji Jacobs, who enrolled her three children in SLS last fall. "They're no longer ruled by grades, like it was decided



who you were in life based on a grade,” continued Jacobs, a floral designer and former private school teacher. “They feel at home. They’re accepted for who they are. They’re genuinely loved.”

Barbara Warne enrolled her daughter Elizabeth into SLS six years ago, after six years at a highly touted magnet school. The magnet school has a long waiting list but, for Elizabeth who has ADHD, it never worked.

“I was brainwashed into thinking that this was the best school choice,” said Warne, a stay-at-home mom whose husband is an Army veteran and airplane mechanic. “Every day, they made her feel like a failure. It started to get to her mentally.”

Warne said she was sold on SLS as soon as she and Elizabeth attended an open house. She watched her daughter interact with Manfra and other students and immediately “start coming out of her shell.”

“It was unfolding in front of me,” Warne said. “I was getting my kid back.”

For Manfra, finding a good facility was

the biggest hurdle.

Facilities are an issue for many on the education frontier. Official definitions of “school” can be a challenge for smaller, harder-to-define operations. There’s a hodgepodge of zoning rules and building codes regulating “schools.”

Facility one for the pod that became SLS was in a house. But the pod outgrew it.

Facility two was in a community rec center. But it wasn’t ideal. School supplies and equipment had to be moved to and from the facility every day.

Facility three was another house. At this point, the pod had nine or 10 students. But the pod couldn’t stay because the house did not meet building codes for “educational occupancy.” Getting the pod up to code would have cost at least \$50,000, Manfra said. And there was still the possibility local officials would not approve a zoning change and building use exemption.

Facility four was in a church. But if the pod wanted to become a private school—so it could accept school choice scholarships and be accessible to more families—the church would need upgrades.

Facility five was in another community rec center. It did meet requirements for a private school, so SLS could now accept scholarships. But when the center got a grant to renovate, it didn’t renew the lease.

Facility six is SLS’s current home. It’s a 4,600-square-foot commercial building that once housed a day care and construction company. Manfra had to be persistent to get a building use exemption but, in the end, SLS got what it needed.

SLS’s motto is “unity in diversity.”

Half the students are students of color.

Nearly all are from working-class families.

A fifth are from military families.

Although the school encourages students to choose their battles, staff do not seek to prevent conflict or difference of opinion, seeing it as an opportunity for development, and assist with consultation when necessary.

They are Christian, Muslim, atheist, agnostic. Manfra and her two kids are Baha'i.

School choice enabled SLS to be diverse and different.

"Without the scholarships, only one type of family would be here," Manfra said. "School choice scholarships make it so all families can be here."

SLS occasionally holds "diversity BBQs" for its families.

Parents and students debate hot topics. Race. Religion. Politics.

The students "need to know that someone that doesn't believe the same as you, or look the same as you, does not make them a bad person," Warne said.

"I want my kids to hear all sides," continued Warne, a registered Republican. People may disagree on some issues but "we're trying to get somewhere, together."

Things can heat up at the BBQs. But there is mutual respect and friendship. The BBQs ends in hugs.

SLS is now seeking to help other micro-schools grow—and avoid the mistakes it made.

This year, Manfra helped a former private school teacher in Tampa start her own micro-school. It's a dual language school.

But there's no end to the variety teachers can create, Manfra said.

"Give them their space, give them their freedom," she said, "and they will show you what they can do."

With education choice in the mix, the same is increasingly true for anybody with a good idea.

Manfra said if she can do it, anybody can.

"I'm not special," she said. "There's a lot of me's."

Ron Matus is director for policy and public affairs at Step Up for Students and a former editor of redefinED, where he spearheaded the extremely important "Voucher Left" series.



A Commonsense Approach to Addressing Homelessness

Erinn Broadus

Homelessness a national concern

The increase in homelessness and responses to it have been of growing concern in cities nationwide. Nationally, the number of overall homeless individuals increased by about five percent, from 549,928 in 2016 to 580,466 in 2020. The number of chronically homeless, however, defined by being homeless for over a year or four times in

three years, increased by 15 percent. Of the chronically homeless, the majority (66 percent) are unsheltered.

Addressing this issue is costly. In Florida, \$94 million from the state and \$98 million from the federal government was allotted to address homelessness in 2021. Miami-Dade got the bulk of that funding—nearly \$45 million. Even more has

been spent in larger cities—\$360 million in San Francisco and \$600 million in Los Angeles—yet homelessness has increased in these California cities.

Despite marginal decreases in Florida's overall homelessness, residents across the Sunshine State have expressed concern about the encampments in their neighborhoods and the mental stability of those within them. In [Polk County](#), where 35 percent of the homeless population exhibits symptoms of serious mental illness, 90 percent of the residents agreed more needs to be done to address their needs. According to 2020 data from the [US Department of Housing and Urban Development](#), about 40 percent of the nation's and 30 percent of Florida's homeless have a severe mental disorder or chronic substance abuse problems

and that percentage has been gradually increasing over the years.

Other means of measurement indicate that those percentages could be even higher. In a 2019 survey of more than 64,000 homeless individuals from 15 states, [California Policy Lab](#) found that 75 percent of unsheltered homeless persons had substance abuse issues. 78 percent had mental health conditions, and 50 percent had substance abuse, mental health, and physical health conditions.

The cohort of homeless persons living outdoors is usually the most erratic because they refuse or do not have access to the psychiatric help they need. Substance use and unmet mental health needs are significant contributing factors differentiating unsheltered homeless from their

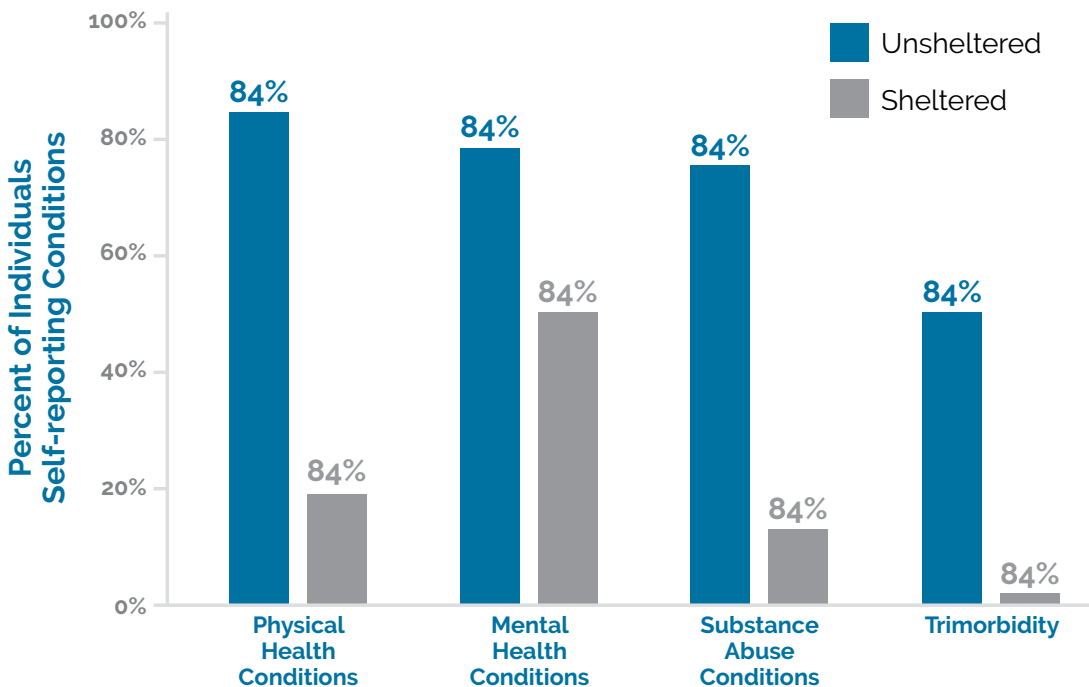


Figure 1: Physical health, mental health, substance abuse, and trimorbidity by shelter status

sheltered (emergency shelters, cars, or government-assisted housing) counterparts. When [asked](#) about the main factors that lead to homelessness, unsheltered individuals were three times as likely to report mental health conditions (50 percent compared to 17 percent) and eight times as likely to report drug use (51 percent compared to six percent) than those with some sort of shelter. The fact that those with the most pressing behavioral needs are the ones most public-facing has created a disconnect between societal expectations of decency and what has been allowed to thrive. Stories of the consequences of this abound. In January, a homeless man with a history of violence [pushed](#) a New York woman in front of a moving train to her death. He had previously been declared unfit to stand trial following a psychiatric evaluation. Last month in Florida, a homeless man named Semmie Williams Jr. stood trial to determine his competency after the [senseless stabbing](#) and murder of a 14-year-old boy on his bike. Mr. Williams had previously been jailed and hospitalized for his delusions and hallucinations and the psychologist tasked with evaluating him described him as a “seriously mentally ill man.” Other stories, such as the woman [attacked](#) with a bag of human feces while waiting for the bus, indicate that addressing this subset of homelessness requires more than just affordable housing.

It is not surprising that this group is often characterized by mental instability and needs substantially more services than those simply in poverty. The increase in homelessness as defined by living outdoors can be directly attributed, at least in part, to

the elimination of psych wards in the 1950s. Because of abuses within the institution and hopes of a better system, the [patient population](#) in psychiatric institutions decreased from over one million in 1970 to about 100,000 today. Many of those who would have benefited from long-term psychiatric care find themselves on the street, in jail, or both.

While those living outdoors with mental health issues do not constitute the majority of those experiencing homelessness, they are precisely the group wreaking havoc on our public spaces. If we want to reclaim our cities, we cannot do so by simply waiting for them to change their mind. When your choices are determined, or at least heavily influenced, by mental instability and drug addiction, it is not reasonable to expect rational decision-making.

Reducing Unsheltered Homelessness

Addressing this issue will require several agencies to collaborate, from mental health professionals to the police. Many times, those with extreme mental disabilities are not capable of entering treatment or accessing stabilizing treatments independently. Forced treatment, or civil commitment, is one step cities and states can take to provide the treatment necessary for those extreme cases of homelessness. The legality of this option differs from state to state, but the general criteria for admittance require an individual to be deemed a danger to themselves or others. To address the unmet needs of those requiring psychiatric stays, the Federal Department of Health issued a waiver on the limits previously placed on

Medicaid funds for long-term psychiatric care. Despite this, no states have accepted and implemented the expansion of funding for these purposes.

Several states have attempted to protect the public by passing laws allowing involuntary commitment in the most urgent cases. Unfortunately, these laws were actualized after the tragic loss of a loved one and are rarely used in their wake. In 1999, Andrew Goldstein, a man inflicted by his demons, pushed Kendra Webdale in front of a moving train. Prior to that day, he had attacked at least 13 other people and several individuals at the hospital to which he was admitted. Despite a pattern of aggression, Goldstein was continuously released from psychiatric care and put back into the public. Because of the inability of the state to subdue him or protect the public from his violent tendencies, Kendra's Law was enacted in New York to authorize courts to force mentally ill individuals with a problematic history—such as incarceration or violence—into treatment plans. From 1999 to 2019, homelessness of those committed under [Kendra's Law](#) decreased from 28 percent to 12 percent (before entering the program compared to while in the program). Additionally, incarceration of those in the program declined from 28 percent to eight percent. A similar law in California, [Laura's Law](#), was implemented after 19-year-old Laura Wilcox and two others were gunned down by a delusional Scott Harlan Thorpe, who was convinced the FBI was trying to murder him. A 2020 [evaluation](#) by the California Department of Healthcare Services of 228 individuals from 13 counties that participated in Assisted Outpatient Treatment

under Laura's Law found promising results: homelessness and hospitalization decreased by 30 percent and 33 percent. Victimization was reduced by 85 percent, and violent behavior decreased by 64 percent. Despite the effectiveness of programs like civil commitment and outpatient treatment, they are seldom used because of strong opposition from powerful civil liberty groups.

Involuntary treatment has worked even for those who don't want the services. Drug courts have proved influential for individuals who haven't hit "rock bottom" and have no intention of seeking help for themselves. Gaining clarity through sobriety in jail and access to resources have proved transformative for many people. As such, the police should be a tool utilized to ensure that those committing crimes are addressed and no longer pose a danger to themselves or the public. A review of drug court effectiveness by the [Office of National Drug Control Policy](#) found that drug courts reduce crime by eight to 35 percent, depending on how they are administered.

Limiting Lawlessness by Expanding Criminal Justice Resources

Whether selling or using drugs, urinating in public, or committing assault, breaking the law should be penalized and addressed. By looking the other way at illegal acts within the confines of a homeless camp, one effectively condones and encourages that behavior. In San Francisco, leadership has taken a "hands off" approach to low-level drug use and dealing, and the situation has become dire. Used needles, trash, drug use, and overdoses have taken

over in certain areas, effectively kicking the public out in favor of outright criminality. In some cities, drug users and dealers are seen openly using and dealing drugs without consequence. Homeless deaths in San Francisco doubled from March of 2020 to March of 2021—primarily because of drug [overdoses](#). While COVID certainly contributed to the increase in overdoses for both the homeless and the public alike, San Francisco’s unwillingness to address lawlessness has proved lethal. [Recently](#), the people of San Francisco recalled District Attorney Chesa Boudin because of his inability to address these problems effectively. Creating a safe, cohesive community for residents necessarily requires an expectation of law abidance. Research has indicated that two essential elements in deterring crime are the swiftness of the response and the certainty that it will happen. In short, when potential offenders are sure that they will be reprimanded, they are less likely to engage in criminal behavior. Breaking the law, regardless of mental capacity or housing, must be addressed by those tasked with enforcing the law—the police.

Substance use problems contribute to crime for a significant portion of offenders and investing in an effective and swift criminal justice system is a way to help both the offender and the victim. The [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#) provides guidance for effective drug treatment. First and foremost, the duration of time spent in

treatment is critical. Three months is the bare minimum, and the longer in treatment the better the likelihood of success. Second, drug treatment must be monitored continuously. One of the biggest reasons treatment approaches fail is that users exit the program too quickly or need additional care not being provided. Finally, treatment does not need to be voluntary for it to be effective.

An excellent way to adhere to the principles of effective treatment for both mental health and substance use issues is to lean into treatment options and availability within the confines of incapacitation—be it the local jail or mental institution.

Resolving the problem of unsheltered homeless individuals will take an expectation of accountability from those currently in that living situation and municipal leadership. The police are only as useful as the courts who decide what to do with the offender. And the courts are only as valuable as the services they can provide—whether long-term or not. By expanding treatment options and emergency shelters and returning to a rule of law that holds all members of society accountable for their transgressions, the public can begin to reclaim their outdoor spaces. Not only that, but the chronically homeless can begin to reclaim their lives.

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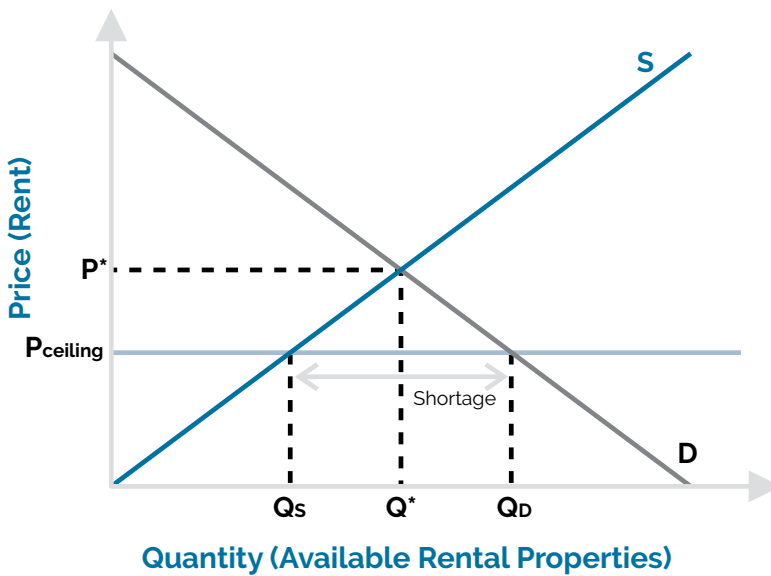
Reminder: Rent Control will not Solve the Florida Housing Crisis

Mason Robinson & Chloe Kauffman

Orange County is facing a lawsuit from The Florida Apartment Association and the Florida Association of Realtors over its decision to add a rent control proposal to the 2022 November ballot.¹ The proposal, which aims to selectively cap rent increases for a year, is the latest revival of the classic price-control method policymakers have used to stabilize the prices of amenities and goods. Rent

control places limits (or price “ceilings”) on the amount a landlord may charge a tenant for rent. While rent control has historically been promoted to improve housing affordability for low-income families, its unintended consequences tend to harm the very families it aims to assist.²

Despite well-documented negative effects of rent control—and a Florida statute that restricts its practice within the



state—some state lawmakers and local commissioners are pushing for its revival.³ With the cost of housing rapidly increasing within the Sunshine State, policymakers must focus on reducing barriers to housing market entry for developers. This approach would increase the housing supply and thus reduce costs for inhabitants rather than exacerbate the crisis using the same counteractive initiatives that have failed in the past. Rent control has proved to cause a multiplicity of adverse effects, including decreased affordability, gentrification, and negative spillovers in the surrounding neighborhood.⁴ Problems that rent regulation aims to fix end up becoming amplified.

The practice of capping rent prices has a long history within the United States and continues to incite debate among lawmakers. Amongst economists, however, the policy is not very popular because it merely imposes a price ceiling on the housing market.⁵ As demonstrated by the fundamental

supply/demand model pictured below, a price ceiling creates an imbalance between the quantity of supplied housing and the quantity of demanded housing. In other words, the amount of individuals/families seeking rent-controlled units exceeds the number of rent-controlled units available in a given area, causing a shortage in affordable housing. Price ceilings create the illusion of lower rent prices, but only a select few benefit from such a policy.

Affordable housing shortages encouraged by rent control occur because landlords are unable to charge rent prices that would otherwise prevail under an area's housing market equilibrium. Rent control incentivizes—or financially forces—them to sell, demolish, or convert their rental properties to recover their losses. This is what economists Rebecca Diamond, Timothy McQuade, and Franklin Qian found when examining the effect of rent control policies on San Francisco's housing market

from 1990 to 2016.⁶ Like Florida, the city of San Francisco had been experiencing high housing costs, and its local officials sought to relieve this by implementing rent control policies. Diamond and her colleagues reported a 15% decrease in the supply of rental housing caused by these laws and noted a city-wide rent increase of 5.1% due to the reduction of overall housing supply. These affordable housing shortages displace many low-income families from their communities, which can have detrimental impacts on their health, transportation options, and education access.

There are ways that lawmakers can effectively address Florida's housing and cost-of-living crises without stalling the housing market and displacing communities. One avenue would be to ease zoning and land-use regulations in high-demand areas. These laws, which regulate everything from the size and use of land to historic preservation requirements, can be costly and daunting for developers to comply with. Strict zoning laws are proven to make new development close to impossible. In fact, "in nearly every major U.S. city, apartments are banned in at least 70 percent of residential areas."⁷ Such laws deter—or prevent—new housing development, thus stagnating supply and causing housing costs to rise. These high costs are passed down to tenants in the form of higher rent and outprice many households from their communities.

In removing tedious zoning and land-use provisions, Florida's state and local governments would drastically reduce the barriers of entry for housing developers. The result is increased housing construction within high-demand areas and decreased

rent prices for residents. Additionally, tax breaks could incentivize owners of single-family residences to turn their homes and properties into multi-family dwellings. This would also work to increase the supply of properties available for rent.

The high housing costs experienced throughout the Sunshine State are a result of a skyrocketing demand for housing, exacerbated by unprecedented migration patterns. This has prompted many state lawmakers, like those in Orange County, to propose a classic price-control restraint on rents to "stabilize" affordable housing options. However, this outdated method of placing a price ceiling on rental rates will not fix the housing crisis but merely create further imbalances within the state's housing market. As seen in its previous implementations, rent control decreases the number of properties available for rent and displaces the families it intends to help. Instead of repeating a historic mistake, Florida lawmakers should take steps to reduce tedious barriers of entry—such as unnecessary zoning and land-use laws—to increase the supply of housing. This way, housing supply will be able to satisfy high housing demand and reduce the cost of living for all Florida residents.

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Killed with Kindness.

How Socialized Medicine Weaponizes

Susan Riggs

Having lived with the reality of socialized medicine throughout most of my adult life, I assure you, it kills with the softest of touches:

In Feb. 2019, I awakened to a Canadian radio host interviewing a hospital spokesman and a relative of a patient who had chosen to die at the hands of Canada's Medical

Assistance in Dying Law (M.A.I.D. for short and, yes, they really call it that). The spokesman explained how these patients are treated with, "the highest priority," and receive the "best death possible." Upon receiving a positive response from the family member, he quipped, "it sounds as if the system worked for you!"

Worked for us?

In April 2021, armed forces entered Ontario's (teaching) hospitals, which had been "overwhelmed"—a word (along with "triaged") that our media uses frequently to describe hospitals across Canada.

As Covid raged, the President of M.A.I.D. sent letters to every regulatory college in Canada warning that assisted dying is now proclaimed an "essential [healthcare] service" by the Health Authority and must not be neglected in a national emergency.

Granted, no system does well in a pandemic, but "ringing for the M.A.I.D" must seem odd to U.S. readers living within an entrepreneurial system that still has the capacity for a nuanced conversation about "end of life" issues.

Throughout Covid, many Canadians were lost to the disease: senior citizens in Canada living in long-term care homes formed (at least) *80 percent of Canadian deaths* in 2020, a death rate that vastly overshadows *the 30 percent of such elderly deaths* that took place in American nursing homes (a number cited by Dr. Anthony Fauci on CNN).

As the United States created stellar new treatments to counter Covid, Canadian innovation lollygagged in the death-grip of national entitlement and the lack of competitiveness that implies. With only limited capacity to manufacture its own vaccines, (Canada's early partner, China, was a non-starter), my country has been forced to wait its turn in the Peter against Paul vaccination bidding wars.

Waiting, however, is not new to Canadians, who have labored since the 1960s under a fully government-run healthcare

system that, under the 1982 Canada Health Act, outlaws private medicine for major medical care in a system often compared to those of North Korea and Cuba.

Capacity in these systems is hit and miss, hence: "caveat emptor." While American hospitals routinely operate below capacity, Canadian hospitals typically operate over

capacity in optimal times. True, we have good, talented doctors (and bad ones) in our system, but few are called to meaningful account.

Drugs may be cheaper here but there can be supply shortages. (In March of 2021, Ontario was urged to set up a lottery for a key drug used on Covid-19 patients.)

To understand *how* these government-run systems survive, consider the Netherlands, an early flagship for socialized medicine that today boasts an annual, "real" kill rate of 25 percent of its population if, as the *Guardian News* suggests, you include patients who are allowed to die while allegedly undergoing palliative care.

Deep in their hearts, Canadians know that the family pet receives medical attention more quickly than they do. In one poll, "nearly three quarters of Canadians [felt] the system would not offer the 'comfort and support' they want when facing a life-threatening illness or death."

Nonetheless, socialized medicine is locked into the Canadian DNA—a cobbled together patchwork quilt of systems, loosely managed both federally and provincially, spawning mediocrity at best and necessitated state-run death at worst, nurtured and meticulously cultivated in the rank, hot-house environment of down at the heels,

state-run medicine.

A Canadian intern once observed that every Canadian patient is a “potential liability.” (No potential about it). You grow older, sicker, developing something that the system has not heard of, making everyone feel bad, occasionally forcing a trip to the U.S. if you are very lucky and most are not). The final doomsday bell rings in accord with one unalterable number: your age.

JMI Early Warning

(In articles published in The James Madison Institute Journal, I have warned about the dehumanizing Canadian healthcare system in which patients and their doctors compete for facilities, often-derelect technology, bad or misapplied drugs. Add to this an astounding lack of transparency and a domino effect of incompetence that patients discover, too often, in times of crisis.

Euthanasia was enshrined into Canadian law in 2016, but its compelling presence haunted our medical system well prior to its legalization. Having accompanied my mother through our system over a decade of pre-M.A.I.D. years, I bore witness as to how coerced death is always the elephant in the room, the dark shadow self of the system, lurking within the long wait lines, wandering the half-empty corridors of once-thriving hospitals, now part-ghost towns. (Lots of space but little funding to manage it.) No one worries about fudging wait lists, (as occurred with veterans in the United States a few years ago): your loved one might walk into a hospital upright, articulate, and prepared to heal, (as my mother did on several occasions). Instead, we heard pro-death claptrap—requests

to lower her “number” from a 4 to a 3, which would deny her a full roster of treatment options. My fully alert, insightful (reasonably healthy) mother stood proudly, listening to it all. Story after story from friends, relatives, and neighbors, parallel my own eyewitness account which testifies to the unholy price Canada has paid to maintain a system that may not bankrupt individuals but, in the final analysis, “bankrupts itself.”)

Canada exemplifies how socialized medicine devastates on multiple fronts, driving a formerly noble nation, (that helped to unfold insulin and the Salk polio vaccine), to the unholy shrine of nationally—in incentivized death—morally eviscerating our once-respected judiciary, rendering government impotent and creating a compliant and fearful citizenry—all through the sheer heft of a medical leviathan whose earthquake presence rattles the very foundations of our nation.

The Judiciary: Laying the Foundation for M.A.I.D.

On Feb. 6, 2015, our Supreme Court accepted the inevitable and slipped its judicial glove seamlessly over the steel fist of fiscal demand in the face of a failing healthcare system. It struck down forever the long-standing prohibition against physician-assisted suicide, specifically, Section 241 of the Criminal Code forbidding the aiding, abetting, or consenting to suicide.⁹

The vote was 9-0.

Not one judicial voice rose in support of Canada’s long-standing respect for the traditional “slippery slope” argument that had always worked to protect our society’s most

vulnerable.

Worse, the Court spoke with its sledgehammer “one voice,” “generally reserved for cases in which the Court wants to emphasize its unanimity,” a sharp departure from a 1993 euthanasia case in Canada (Rodriguez), which, although equally as heart-rending, ultimately rejected the state-run killing of patients.

The 2015 pro-death ruling was overturned by a B.C. Superior Court in 2013 on the grounds of *stare decisis* (the original finding must stand), sending pro-death advocates scurrying to the Supreme Court for a reversal.

Two Significant Influences

That 2015 Supreme Court entered its deliberations shouldering the weight of an earlier healthcare decision in a case involving the pervasive and deadly issue of wait lines for health care. Predictably, this ruling failed to accomplish its objectives, but its impact on the thinking of that later Supreme Court injected a bizarre, black swan component into the 2015 proceedings—one that spoke volumes about the motivation of that Court.

Secondly, unlike the 1993 case where the plaintiff was present throughout the proceedings, *directly-affected complainants in the 2015 case had passed away prior to the hearing* and in their stead stood an eclectic medley of pro euthanasia enthusiasts: The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA), family members [of the departed] and medical representation—together forming an amorphous collective that left that Court free to wax eloquent

without the inconvenience of a live patient.

Essentially, the Court cast about for a *new reason* that would invalidate the *stare decisis*, agreeing with the trial judge on most issues and concluding that the 1993 finding was “overbroad,” favoring a pro-life majority against a pro-death minority—hardly a new observation since, in 1993, the patient was legally restricted in deference to the public good.

Nevertheless, “overbreadth” was the blunt tool with which the Court ripped asunder the 1993 decision, claiming it did not address the right to life (as if refusal to allow state killing were anything *but* addressing that right.)

Overall, the Court focused on facts supporting the death right, while ignoring *cautionary evidence*: the Court acknowledged that “evidence on safeguards was weak” in socialized systems and noted that “palliative care actually improved post-legalization [of killing].” Ignored were the implications of this: do fewer patients mean better treatment for some? Might the healthcare system benefit from the death of patients?

Similarly, the Court skimmed over Oregon’s assisted death law, ignoring its requirement for a terminal condition and its censure of direct, doctor-performed killing. (Nothing in Canada’s Supreme Court decision requires a terminal condition, only one that is “grievous and irremediable, (including an illness, disease or disability) that causes enduring suffering that is intolerable to the individual in the circumstances of his or her condition.” As for method, lethal injection is legal in Canada.)

Fighting these skewed judicial

gymnastics was Canada's federal Conservative government led by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who, along with the handicapped and other groups, presented fresh evidence from abroad of the rampant abuse associated with euthanasia. The Court was having none of it, insisting that "*coercion, undue influence, and ambivalence could all be reliably assessed*".

(Really? When Mum arrived at the hospital—upright, articulate, and ready to heal—an unknown doctor ushered me into her office, aware that we had (again) refused to “lower” Mum’s number.irate, the specialist ran away screaming “GOD CALLS EVERYONE HOME!!!”)

The Court lodged its death decision in Section 7 of *Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms* that guarantees the right to “life, liberty and security of person,” rationalizing that killing patients saves them from fear of future incapacity, leading to suicide sooner rather than later. While this rationale is tragically understandable from the perspective of a patient or family member, it is bogus argumentation, ignoring the fact that *most desperate people want to live*.

Ironically, a decade earlier, that same Court had worked to save life, not end it:

The Court's Camelot Moment

In 2005, the Supreme Court had addressed the deadly problem of wait lines in the Province of Quebec (but it could have been any province), declaring that “*timely healthcare*” was important and that “*access to a waiting list is not access to healthcare*,” even granting the request for use of a private insurer when needed.

Ultimately, the entry of the private sector into a fraught, heavily socialized medical system failed—proven in 2019 when an expert witness (in a different case) explained how the 2005 decision had “*created chaos*” in Quebec leaving healthcare “*skewed by market forces*.”

By 2014, that Supreme Court knew of Quebec's still terrible healthcare problems. Why? Quebec had eclipsed the Supreme Court decision on physician assisted suicide by risking all and initiating its own euthanasia law.

Smoothly running systems do not spontaneously pole-vault across the Rubicon to divest of an excessive patient population. So desperate was Quebec healthcare by 2014, there were media rumors that the official record would cite *only the pathological cause of death, in effect concealing such deaths from the public record—proof that even private enterprise could not save these government-run behemoths*.

Desperate Times/Desperate Measures/Pivot to a Kangaroo Court

In 2014, The Toronto Star reported that the Supreme Court off-loaded one of its own “death” cases back to Ontario's Consent and Capacity Board, (CCB), a quasi-legal outlier, seemingly wedged between the justice system and the healthcare system—comprised of non-specialists who make life and death decisions “in a mere 24 hours” (often above the objections of the family), deciding whether patients in the healthcare system should live or die. According to the Toronto Star, “*the Supreme Court hail[ed]*

the Consent and Capacity Board as a model ... that provided a swift and balanced alternative to the courts at a time when the country [was and still is] facing a tidal wave of aging Baby Boomers.”

(N.B. My mother and I experienced one of these healthcare “courts” —not a death court —but a 20 or so-person “panel” of medical personnel assembled to “justify” a misdiagnosis that had led to a drug error that nearly killed her. We were lured through phone calls to a bad part of town on a Friday night at 5:00 p.m., believing that Mum had a simple appointment with one doctor. Instead, we were directed into a football field-sized room packed with strangers who grilled us for over an hour in what could only be called a Kafkaesque experience.)

From Kangaroo Courts... to Hobson’s Choice

By 2015, that Supreme Court’s once-balilyhooed wait list decision must have felt like the Pyrrhic victory it was.

In 2005, the judicial gods had hurled the first thunderbolt to save the patients.

In 2015, they hurled the second to save the system.

Black Swan Moment

In a Hail Mary effort to shore up its shaky rationale for its pro-death finding, (that if the healthcare system did not kill patients, they would kill themselves ... or maybe not?), that Supreme Court attempted to align its 2005 and 2015 decisions by suggesting that both cases derived their right from a “lack of timely health care” — ignoring the fact that, as tragic as these

death cases are (and they all are in the beginning), *only wait lines, provably, create a “threat of death”.*

Did they really believe they could shove the 2005 round peg of a genuine pro-life decision into the square hole of this 2015 pro-death fiasco?

Defeated, the Court pointed the finger at Canada’s system of healthcare:

...Concerns about decisional capacity and vulnerability arise in all end-of-life medical decision-making. Logically speaking, there is no reason to think that the injured ill and disabled who have the option to refuse or to request withdrawal of life-saving or life-sustaining treatment, or who seek palliative sedation, are less vulnerable or less susceptible to biased decision-making than those who might seek more active assistance in dying.

Everybody has the problem, so what’s the problem? The above also fails to differentiate between palliative care (an intent to improve what life there is) and euthanasia (active intent to kill).

Then —a moment of honesty:

“...the risks [of the slippery slope] that Canada, [the opposition], describes, are already part and parcel of our medical system”.

Subtext: we can do nothing.

With those words, reputable jurisprudence was swallowed up in a gulp of pragmatism, rendering vulnerable Canadians *collateral damage and necessitated death just one more thorn on the rose of socialism.*

2016-2021 Legislative Ride to the Bottom

Canada's Supreme Court had driven the coach that delivered the death right to Canadians. An incoming federal Liberal government drove the horses of this apocalypse to its tragic end.

Bill C-14, Medical Assistance in Dying Act (M.A.I.D.) was passed in parliament on June 17, 2016, initially requiring a proviso that death would be “*reasonably foreseeable*,” an ambiguity lifted by 2019. From the beginning, even Canada's normally sedate Senate urged that the new death right include children and the mentally ill: by 2017, the new “right” was extended to a case involving chronic osteo-arthritis; in 2023 mental illness will qualify as well. Last year, Bill C-7 mounted various roadblocks, leaving more Canadians eligible for M.A.I.D. and with easier availability to death as non-physicians, nurse practitioners, and pharmacists all sign on to the death squad.

Media Updates

In March of 2021, I awakened to a feature article in a national publication written by a physician enthusiastic about her new responsibilities:

“The discussion [with the patient]

Makes the choreography [of killing] easy for me.

And that is really what it [planning out a death] is:

A choreographed dance, as studied

But as graceful as ballet.”

Following the decision, apart from a few rebel doctors and journalists, members of various handicapped groups and others, the most vociferous public questioning arose from the medical profession as to

whether doctors could stick the needle in directly to get rid of the patient faster? (You would think that the experience of Oregon, where “nearly one third” of patients who accept these fatal drugs from their physicians never touch them, would warn that people change their minds.)

Today, anti-M.A.I.D. doctors are driven from the profession or forced to refer their patients to an “accommodating” doctor. Worst of all are the pro-M.A.I.D. doctors who flaunt the flimsy safeguards, some bragging to the press about it. If the “flaunters” had been referred to the justice system, (which they were not), the result would have been minimal given the exculpatory nature of M.A.I.D. and its endless “Not more than” clauses severely limiting penalties.

Deep Throat was right: follow the \$\$\$\$ (or its lack)

Canada's *National Post* exposed a “study” entitled “Euthanasia may save \$139 M,” explaining how “M.A.I.D. could reduce annual health spending by \$35 million through what it termed “doctor-hastened death,” “run[ning] as little as \$25, depending on the regimen.” (N.B. Cost was a concern for that 2015 Supreme Court as well, inspiring one journalist to lament, “*six pages on costs; three pages on where the hell is all this leading?*”)

Forget suing: Canada protects doctors at taxpayer expense and usually wins. One provincial judge called the attitude toward patient rights north of the border “a scorched earth approach.”

Will It be M.A.I.D. in America Next?

America would cruise in the wake of its superb free enterprise system for a while—but the reckoning would come.

Socialized medicine insinuates itself into the hallowed halls of any nation gullible enough to sign on.

These systems are doomed by definition—the patient as “liability.” When those liabilities add up, you have a brand new “right” to die.

In the case of Canada, that “right” rendered our system of healthcare both villain and victor in an egregious, judicial dog-and-pony show, which left a country in moral tatters and a judiciary so flummoxed by its inability to address ineffective healthcare that its only solution was assisted death.

If a moral discussion about euthanasia were ever possible, it could *only take place within a successful, entrepreneurial system of medical conveyance*—never within the divided kingdom of socialized medicine which depends upon inflicted death for its own survival.

Still tempted by the words “free healthcare?”

Remember our Supreme Court that tried to hoist the flag of patient rights.

Today, all of Canada flies the skull and crossbones—and lives out the fatal equation:

Socialized Medicine = Weaponized Euthanasia.

Addendum

On July 15, 2022, the British Columbia Court for Appeal unanimously upheld a lower court ban against private medicine for necessary medical treatment in B.C. —a case which Canada’s Globe and Mail had predicted could “upend the very foundation of Canada’s public health care system.”

In 2009, legal action was initiated by Dr. Brian Day, an orthopaedic surgeon and businessman who led the plaintiffs. He sought to overturn provisions of B.C.’s *Medicare Protection Act* which, like similar laws across Canada, enforces the tenets of the *Canada Health Act*, including the ban on private treatment. (Because public healthcare is jointly shared by federal and provincial governments, the issues have been argued province by province.) In his claim, Day invoked Section 7 of Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms, citing, (as did the 2005 Quebec case), the ongoing threat that waiting lists posed to the “life, liberty and security” of patients.

In 2020, a B.C. Court dismissed Day’s constitutional challenge, minimizing the importance of waiting lists, and invoking the “get out of jail free” ending of Section 7 that allows rights to be abrogated in the name of “fundamental justice” —in this case interpreted as protection of Canada’s publicly run, no-fee healthcare system.

Despite upholding the ban, the Appeal Court criticized the lower court, claiming it “erred in finding the impugned provisions did not deprive some patients of the right to life.”

The plaintiffs intend to plead their case before Canada's Supreme Court.

(Author's comment: Because the Charter does not reference a right to healthcare per se—only, in effect, its own right of inexorable control over the means to healthcare, each subsequent ruling reveals how attention is easily deflected away from core issues via a colossal obfuscation of means and ends. Some might argue that Canada's 1982 Canada Health Act was created to uphold, first and foremost, the political correctness of free

medical treatment—the cost of human life notwithstanding—raising the further question as to whether M.A.I.D. , in all its current robust glory, was factored in from the beginning.)

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Florida the Frontier State

Ryan Ellis

Florida is in many ways a frontier state. Like its western counterparts, Florida constantly absorbs an influx of new residents from the other 49 states, as well as overseas. In the past year, Florida has topped the country with 221,000 people moving from other states (on a per-capita basis, it's still ranked a very high seventh).

People come to Florida for the low taxes, warm weather, and lack of government overreach that characterizes places like

California and New York.

The same is true with respect to migration from Cuba and Venezuela in south Florida, and Puerto Rico in central Florida. It's the latter group that deserves some additional focus.

Over the past two election cycles, The James Madison Institute has studied the impact that the Puerto Rican "diaspora" population has on the politics of Florida, and in turn what that means for the United

States. The 2022 edition of this report, again authored by David Freddoso of the Washington Examiner, has been released ahead of the 2022 election season.

David Freddoso is an editor at the Washington Examiner. He's the author of several books on national politics and a protege of the late Robert Novak. He's one of the keenest election night minds on Twitter, and has done the deep dive homework on how Puerto Ricans in Florida vote compared to their neighbors, and what implications this has for politics in Florida.

Freddoso has discovered a pattern going back a decade in Florida elections—as goes the Puerto Rican vote in central Florida, so goes central Florida; and as goes central Florida, so goes the statewide margin. So, a key question for Republicans and Democrats running for office in Florida is what makes the Puerto Rican vote here tick?

Puerto Rico the Odd Duck

As legal arrangements go, the territory of Puerto Rico is a bit of an odd duck. The roughly three million residents of Puerto Rico are United States citizens. They serve in the U.S. military. They send a non-voting delegate (called a “resident commissioner”) to the U.S. House of Representatives. They pay all U.S. taxes, except on Puerto Rico-source income where even higher taxes are paid to the territorial government. As U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans don't need a passport to travel or move to the fifty United States—indeed, today there are nearly twice as many people of Puerto Rican descent living in the fifty states than there are living in Puerto Rico.

On the other hand, Puerto Rico is

separated from the states in important ways. Besides the local tax issue, there are other differences. They don't get to vote for President of the United States or elect U.S. Senators. They have their own Olympic Team. For tax purposes, they are in many ways treated in the same way as a foreign country (for example, several large U.S. corporations have controlled foreign corporations set up in Puerto Rico). The relationship with entitlement programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and food stamps is irregular, despite the full payment of payroll taxes to Washington.

As a result, the key question which separates Puerto Ricans from other Americans is the so-called “status question.” Over decades of plebiscites and other measures, it's clear that a majority (though not an overwhelming one) of Puerto Ricans living on the island would like to become the 51st state. Others would prefer to maintain the current territorial status. Still others would like some “third way,” or even outright independence.

Puerto Ricans Living and Voting in Florida

Since Puerto Ricans can move to any state, it should not surprise anyone that many Puerto Ricans have chosen to migrate to Florida. After all, who wouldn't want to move to a place with no state income tax, plenty of job opportunities, and an existing community of neighbors who preceded you?

According to Freddoso's research, there are 1.1 million potential Puerto Rican voters living in the state of Florida. Freddoso's research has definitively shown that for the past decade (at least), the vote-moving

issues for these voters include the same kitchen table and pocketbook items that all voters care about. However, these voters have another first-tier issue uniquely their own—they want Puerto Rico to be allowed to become a state if they want to be. After all, these voters have already chosen statehood with their feet by moving from Puerto Rico to Florida. They are patriotic and want their homeland to join the several states just like Arizona, Alaska, and Florida have.

Whether it's a gubernatorial, senatorial, or presidential statewide election, being open and respectful to the Puerto Rican Floridian's aspiration for statehood is a minimum requirement to getting a sufficient share of the Puerto Rican vote to win central Florida, and ultimately the whole state. This is a key insight Freddoso's research has yielded, and it is only possible due to the opportunities and high standards JMI demands. To my knowledge, no other time series study exists which shows this particular social science data.

That does not mean that a presidential, senatorial, or gubernatorial candidate must endorse statehood in order to win the hearts and minds of Puerto Rican Floridians—but he or she should be respectful of it. A politician with the position “I don't think Puerto Rico should ever be a state” or “As long as I have anything to say about it Puerto Rico will never be a state” is unlikely to get a sufficient share of the Puerto Rican vote to win statewide. It's that simple. Just like Cubans and Venezuelans have their own idiosyncratic vote-moving issues, Puerto Ricans have theirs.

Freddoso shows in his analysis that this is not a partisan issue. Republicans and

Democrats that respect the Puerto Rican aspiration for statehood do well with Florida voters of Puerto Rican descent. Those who do not respect that aspiration, from either party, underperform and risk losing the state.

Florida the Bellwether

Florida is not the swing state it was in the first decade of this century. It has become a much redder state. However, as Freddoso has found, a politician who doesn't manage the Puerto Rican population in central Florida intelligently can easily lose a statewide election with this margin alone.

The truth about how to handle Puerto Rican voters in Florida is increasingly well known among savvy political consultants and politicians in Florida (thanks in large part to the social science research done by JMI), but the rest of the country is behind the learning curve.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) often uses an “over my dead body” line in his stump speeches about making sure the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico will never become states so long as he is the Senate Majority Leader. The implication, of course, is that these two new states would yield four dependably Democratic senators. This is ironic, since the current resident commissioner of Puerto Rico is a Republican, and the Puerto Rican governorship and legislature regularly swings back and forth between the major political parties (unlike reliably Democratic D.C.)

Besides the inaccurate equivocation between the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico as political entities, McConnell also

makes life hard on Republicans running statewide in Florida. It's awkward for Marco Rubio or Rick Scott to campaign in central Florida and get questioned by voters about the Kentucky senator's comments (which get routinely repeated in other GOP senators' talking points). Ditto for Governor DeSantis as he raises his national profile. Whoever the Republican nominee for president is will also have to explain McConnell's position locally.

The Democrats are not exempt from this issue. Many national Democrats are determined to pursue a "third way" arrangement or independence for Puerto Rico, and are viewed as outright opponents of statehood.

That doesn't do any favors for Democrats running statewide in Florida, especially given the rightward shift of the state since the turn of the century.

National politicians in both parties don't understand the local dynamics of Puerto Ricans living in Florida. That's why it's crucial to continue to highlight that the JMI study of this topic makes the case that respect for statehood aspirations is the key to winning over Puerto Rican-Floridian voters.

Ryan Ellis is president of the Center for a Free Economy.



NFTmarks

Brian L. Frye

For better or worse, everyone's heard of NFTs (non-fungible tokens) and the digital art market they created essentially out of nothing. But no one really understands NFTs or the NFT market, not even the people creating and collecting them. What are NFTs and why do people want to own them? I'd be lying if I said I

knew. Ask two enthusiasts and you'll get three answers, maybe none of them true, and certainly not the full story.

Still, I think it's possible to draw some conclusions about why people value NFTs and how the NFT market works by observing which NFTs are popular and what people do with them. The most popular NFT

collections are currently CryptoPunks and Bored Ape Yacht Club. Why do collectors want to own those NFTs and what can their choices tell us about why collectors value NFTs?

The value of an NFT seems to depend primarily on the popularity of the brand it represents. NFT collectors want to own NFTs associated with popular brands and want to associate themselves with those brands. That's why the most popular NFT collections are designed to be used as profile pictures or "PFPs." NFT collectors crave the clout of owning a popular NFT and PFP NFTs make it easy to show off.

Often, the best way to understand a market is to study disputes and determine why they arise and how they are resolved. The biggest dispute in the NFT market is currently Yuga Labs' trademark infringement action against Ryder Ripps.¹ Yuga created the Bored Ape Yacht Club (BAYC) NFT collection and is the gorilla of the NFT space. Ryder Ripps is a conceptual artist who claims Yuga is a front for racist Nazi trolls.² Ripps trolled them right back by creating and selling his own NFTs of the Bored Ape Yacht Club images and essentially daring Yuga to sue him.

Yuga took the bait. What will it mean for the Bored Ape Yacht Club NFT collection and the NFT space? We shall see. But I suspect the lawsuit will force courts and collectors to ask why people value NFTs. Ripps says the BAYC images are racist. How will his allegations affect the value of the BAYC NFTs? I have no idea. But I'm pretty confident the outcome will tell us a lot about the NFT market.

What is an NFT?

Technically, a non-fungible token or "NFT" is a particular kind of data recorded on a digital ledger, typically the blockchain of a digital currency. The data on a blockchain usually represents ownership of a quantity of the native currency of that blockchain. An NFT represents something else, typically "ownership" of a digital image. An NFT is a "token" because it represents something other than digital currency, and is "non-fungible" because every NFT is unique.

As a practical matter, the NFT market is the digital equivalent of the art market. When art collectors buy a painting or sculpture, what they're really buying is an entry on an artist's catalogue raisonné, the list of all of the works attributed to that artist. Of course, ownership of a catalog entry is usually represented by a physical token, often a dirty canvas or lumpy rock. But it's the catalog entry that is valuable, not the token. If the connection between the token and the catalog entry is broken, the token is worthless. A million-dollar painting is worth nothing if it turns out to be a forgery.

The NFT market works the same way, except it eliminates the need for a physical token by enabling transactions in the catalog entry itself. Most NFTs represent "ownership" of a work of art, usually a digital image. NFT collectors value NFTs based on the works of art they represent. However, NFT collectors only value NFTs they consider legitimate, and the perceived legitimacy of an NFT usually depends on who created it. In general, NFTs created by the author of a work are considered legitimate, but NFTs created by someone else usually

are not.

Most people assume NFTs consist of digital images. They're wrong, but it's a reasonable mistake. While NFTs typically represent ownership of a digital image, few NFTs actually include a copy of the image they represent. While an NFT can consist of any kind or quantity of data, writing data onto a blockchain is costly, so most NFTs contain as little data as possible, typically just the wallet address of the NFT's owner and a URL pointing to the digital image the NFT represents. In other words, most NFTs are the digital equivalent of a certificate of authenticity. Usually, an NFT isn't itself a work of art, but rather represents ownership of a work of art.

NFTs as Property

So, what does it mean for an NFT to represent "ownership" of a work of art? It depends. There are lots of different ways of owning a work. In the conventional art market, collectors usually own a physical object, like a painting or sculpture, or at least a certificate of authenticity that represents ownership of a work. Often, it's also possible to own the copyright in a work if it includes copyrightable subject matter and the copyright term hasn't ended. And one can also own a trademark in an artist's brand. For example, the painter Thomas Kinkade registered the word mark PAINTER OF LIGHT.³

Digital art is the same, except there's no physical object to own. For decades, digital artists tried to sell their work by giving collectors physical certificates of authenticity, with little success. Unfortunately, collectors just weren't buying it. But somehow, NFTs

changed everything. Suddenly, collectors clamored for these new digital certificates of authenticity.

What does it mean to own an NFT of a work? It's the same as owning a painting or sculpture, except you own a digital token, rather than a physical one. When you buy a painting or sculpture, you get a physical object, but you don't get any rights in the work it represents, other than the right to display the object you own. The artist keeps the copyright and controls their brand. NFTs are the same. You get a digital object and the implicit right to display the work it represents unless the artist gives you more.

So, what do you get when you buy a work of art, whether it's a painting, a sculpture, or an NFT? You get the right to claim ownership of the thing you bought, whatever that means. It doesn't seem like much. But it's all that matters. The owner of a painting, sculpture, or NFT doesn't need to own a copyright or control a brand. All they need is the ability to sell whatever they own to someone else.

A painting or sculpture is a thing you can sell. So is an NFT. The only difference is that everyone is familiar with the market for paintings and sculptures, so no one thinks twice about it. By contrast, the market for NFTs is new, so it seems weird and people don't understand it. But they're actually the same. Art markets are just markets for being the owner of prestige goods other people want to own.

NFT IP

Still, new markets, new problems. It's all well and good to observe that the NFT market is essentially identical to the



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conventional art market. But it's another thing entirely to convince artists and collectors. People want to understand what they own and the easiest way to understand NFTs is as a kind of intellectual property. Unfortunately, this conception isn't very helpful.

While NFT enthusiasts disagree about almost everything, they especially disagree about whether "intellectual property" matters to the NFT market. Unfortunately, this use of the meaningless term intellectual property just confuses the question. Yes, NFTs present lots of copyright and trademark problems. But the answers depend on copyright and trademark law, not intellectual property handwaving.

Most NFTs represent ownership of a digital image. So the key copyright question is whether NFT ownership should also mean copyright ownership. Some NFT collectors insist copyright ownership is critical to the value of an NFT. But others prefer CC0 NFTs,⁴ arguing NFT images should be in the public domain.

Different NFT creators approach copyright differently—if they think about copyright at all! —but there are three typical outcomes. Some do nothing and keep any copyright in the images associated with their NFTs, like Larva Labs did with CryptoPunks. Some give some or all the copyright to the NFT owner, like Yuga Labs did with Bored Ape Yacht Club. And some put

the images in the public domain, like Nouns Foundation did with Nouns.

So, is owning the copyright in the image associated with an NFT actually valuable? Who knows? Intellectual property maximalists insist it is, but I'm not so sure. For one thing, some NFT images may not even be copyrightable in the first place, and the copyright in many others is probably quite narrow.⁵

For another, it's unclear why anyone would want to license particular NFT images. Copyright protects original works of authorship. But most of the popular NFTs represent automatically generated images, many of which are quite similar to each other. Why license any particular image, if you can license a similar one for less? Or just generate a new image which isn't associated with any NFT. Owning the copyright in the image associated with an NFT is valuable only if people want to license that particular image, as opposed to any similar image.

What about trademarks? They present similar problems. Sure, the owner of an NFT can claim and even register a trademark in the image associated with their NFT. But just because you use your NFT image in connection with your product or service doesn't mean consumers will notice, and that's all trademark law really cares about. Most of the popular NFT collections consist of thousands of similar images, differentiated by features only NFT enthusiasts find compelling, or even notice. And if consumers can't tell one image from another, those images are unlikely to make good trademarks.

Realistically, what most NFT images communicate is the brand of the NFT

collection, not the brand of the NFT owner. Sure, some celebrities and NFT influencers have managed to turn their Punk or Ape image into a brand, at least to a limited degree. But it's their own brand doing all the work, not the NFT. And the stronger a brand their NFT image becomes, the less able similar images become to function as brands in the first place.

Who benefits? The creator of the NFT collection, whose brand becomes stronger and stronger as the collection becomes more popular and is used by more people. When NFT owners use their NFT images as brands, what they're really doing is free (or sometimes paid) publicity for the creator of the NFT collection.

In other words, from a trademark perspective, the valuable brand is the brand of the collection and the consumer goodwill associated with it, not particular NFT images. That's why Yuga gives Bored Ape Yacht Club NFT owners the "IP" associated with their NFT image, whatever that means. It's not only free for Yuga, it's a canny way of encouraging Ape NFT owners to promote Yuga's brand. And it's why Yuga bought the Punks "IP" from Larva, even if there wasn't much to buy. What they wanted was the brand.

A Pyrrhic Victory?

Yuga's lawsuit against Ripps is important because it shows how much of Yuga's value is tied up in the Bored Ape Yacht Club brand. Notably, Yuga didn't really care about other NFT collections that "ripped" off the Ape images, like PHAYC and Phunky Ape Yacht Club, which used "flipped" Ape images. Those collections weren't harming Yuga's

brand. If anything, they were promoting it.

Ripps is different. He's threatening the value of Yuga's brand, and Yuga is doing everything in its power to make him stop. Can they? Even if their trademark infringement claims are successful in court, the lawsuit is only amplifying Ripps's damaging claims. Yuga's trying to contain the damage, but

who knows whether it will work. At the very least, it suggests that NFTs really are all about branding.

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- 1 1 See generally *Yuga Labs, Inc. v. Ryder Ripps et al*, 2:22-cv-04355 (C.D. Ca. June 24, 2022).
- 2
- 3 PAINTER OF LIGHT, Reg. No. 1988294.
- 4 <https://cyberscrilla.com/what-is-a-cc0-nft/>
- 5 See, e.g., Brian L. Frye, *Are CryptoPunks Copyrightable?*, *Pepperdine Law Review* (forthcoming) (arguing that the CryptoPunks images may not be copyrightable) and Alfred "Dave" Steiner, *Bored Apes & Monkey Selfies: Copyright & PFP NFTs*, at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4116638 (arguing that the copyright in the Bored Ape Yacht Club images is very narrow).



It's the Four R's Now:

The Future of Academics and Virtual Reality— an Interview with Erika Donalds

Doug Tutill

Editor's Note: JMI's long-time friend Erika Donalds recently launched the Optima Classical Academy, the nation's first virtual reality school with a focus on classical liberal arts curriculum. This innovative development got the attention of Step Up for Students President Doug Tutill, who featured Erika on his highly acclaimed podcast. Below is a (lightly edited) transcript of their conversation.

Doug Tutill: I'm excited to have Erika Donalds with us today. Erika has long been a champion of education choice in Florida. She's a former school board member in Collier County—which is the Naples, Florida area—and now heads the Optima Foundation. Erika, what is the Optima Foundation and what does it do?

Erika Donalds: The Optima Foundation is a nonprofit I started back in 2017. We help establish and expand high-quality schools of choice in communities here in Florida and now expanding across the country. We currently manage and oversee four schools, as of this fall, all the way from Jacksonville to Naples serving just under

3,000 students and we've got about 2,500 students on our waiting list. Also, we are in the process of launching the world's first virtual reality school. All our schools are in the classical tradition, delivering a liberal arts education that is both content-rich and virtue-based.

Tuthill: Let's talk about Optima Classical Academy. It's fascinating because it's a merger of virtual reality as a teaching tool, as well as a classical curriculum. Let's talk a little bit about what the school intends to do. What grades are you going to have in the fall? Then, we'll dive a little deeper into virtual reality and classical education, and how they come together.

Donalds: It is an interesting divergence of the most traditional type of education and the most innovative and cutting-edge technology—so, it's hard for some people to get their heads around. But during the pandemic, we sought to replicate the in-person experience for remote learning as much as possible. Unfortunately, not everyone did that. Obviously, remote learning as it's come to be known was detrimental to a lot of families—but that's not remote learning, it's actually remote not-learning. Our students were learning remotely. They received live instruction every single day. We sent home analog materials for them: books, workbooks, and things like that. Then we also had the virtual component where they were doing activities online, and what we heard from families was that they loved it. They wanted us to continue that offering because they enjoyed schooling at home. Many of our families now have more flexible work schedules or they're working from home. So, we wanted to create the gold standard of

virtual education.

We partnered with a gentleman named Adam Mangana—who's on my team now—who has been working in virtual reality education for almost a decade. We've combined those two things—live learning every day with a teacher live in a classroom in virtual reality and the Canvas learning management system with a robust classical curriculum. Also, we will be sending our students analog materials so they will be reading paper books of the classic literature that are included in our curriculum and they'll be annotating those books. They'll be writing in their math workbooks and notebooks as well as receiving live instruction in VR and doing some project-based learning outside. I think this is the new version of virtual remote education that's going to make it accessible, but also high quality for families across the country and maybe around the world.

Tuthill: So, you're opening in the fall as a charter school. What grades are you having?

Donalds: In Florida, we're offering full-time, grades three to eight. Students can also select individual courses if they would like to have an individual course and not full-time enrollment. We are also doing field trips—virtual reality field trips—that anyone can access who has a headset or, if they need a headset, we're happy to provide that. We are really making all these experiences accessible, whether it's full-time school all the way to individual field trips.

Tuthill: Let's talk a little more in depth about the experience of virtual reality for students and how the virtual reality field trip might actually work. Give me some

examples of where you would take children through virtual reality and what that experience would be like for the kids.

Donalds: Well, one of our field trips is to the moon and studying the lunar landing—actually from the moon itself. One of our field trips goes to Independence Hall and we walk through the founding of the Constitution and the Founding Fathers. We look at the artifacts that were created there and hear from some of the Founding Fathers in Independence Hall. We take students to the Oval Office when they're learning about the presidency. These are places that are so awesome because a lot of these students will never go to these places—or have never been anywhere outside of their hometown—and we're able to take them on some amazing trips.

We have some science field trips that simply go out into the mountains or underwater and they're studying the water cycle in three dimensions. They're able to label the parts of the water cycle as it's happening in front of them in three dimensions. We have—what you remember in class—these skeletal models. They have the muscles, they're in different layers and they're very expensive. Well, in virtual reality, everyone can have their own parts of the human body. They can hold a beating human heart and see exactly how it works.

Those are the types of experiences that our students have in virtual reality whether they're doing it as a field trip and just a short experience, or it's part of their everyday lessons with their teacher.

Tuthill: This is a huge breakthrough for equality of opportunity because, as you know, families with resources are able to

provide these amazing experiences for children. I was speaking the other day to a state rep who set as a goal when his kids were born to make sure they visited every national park. I think he pretty much had completed that. He had the resources to take his children to every national park in the country, but I when I taught at St. Pete High we had kids who—at high school—had never gone to the beach in St. Pete, which was 10 minutes away. So, the fact that these kids can now experience going to the moon or going to the Oval Office, it's just extraordinary. It begins to level the playing field so that all children can have the same opportunities that historically only kids with fairly affluent families are able to experience.

Donalds: It is and we're so excited to be hitting the market right at this time. Even the VR headsets were inaccessible just a few years ago and now that the prices have come down just a few hundred dollars, we can get these headsets in the hands of students through public funding as a public charter school. We've been able to create with an amazing team of people—who are very passionate about these education experiences—hundreds of locations. And how exciting as a teacher, as well. If you're a teacher who does not have the resources to provide students with these types of experiences, we have curators that help the teachers bring their vision to life of where they want to take the student and what type of 3-D experiences they want to give them. Then not only is it available to that teacher, but to other teachers to utilize as well in our education library. The potential for this, and for the things that will impact our students, is so great and so exciting.

Tuthill: Let's go back to the moon example—because I have to confess, I've never had the resources to take my students to the moon. So, I'm a teacher and my kids want to go on a field trip to the moon. I presume the kids actually feel like they're on the moon? They're actually able to walk around on the moon, is that correct?

Donalds: That's right. They actually do the lunar landing so they kind of get the feeling and understand what it's like when the astronauts are landing on the moon. That's the first thing, they're not just appearing on the moon, they land on the moon. They have to land first. Actually in our lunar landing field trip, they're wearing an astronaut costume and they can see their hands. When they look at their hands, they see that they're in an astronaut costume. They see the other students in this social experience that is our VR in their astronaut gear, but they also are going to be able to study the surface of the Moon; what it is like. The parts of the lessons are what the atmosphere is like and they're able to kind of experience it in three dimensions—not just read about it. They can walk all the way around the moon too and see—in very realistic ways—what the moon looks like, the different facets of it and what it looks like from the moon looking at the earth, for example. Think about how impactful that is for a student, maybe inspiring them to explore that field more—more than looking at those pictures on a page or even on a two-dimensional screen, but actually being in the experience itself.

Tuthill: For a teacher then, I'm taking my kids and going with my kids to the moon. We're landing in the lunar module.

We're getting out of the module. We're walking out to the moon. I'm prepared as a teacher to talk about things like: here's why the gravity is different; here's how it would affect us on the moon; here's why the colors are on the moon; here's what that means from a geological perspective. You mention atmosphere, water issues, potential life issues. I presume that the teacher is prepared to have all those conversations with the kids while they literally feel like they're on the moon.

Donalds: That's right. In the VR classroom, we can create a classroom out of any of these spaces that we've built. On the moon, the teacher can put up a whiteboard and start writing on the whiteboard or they can have a presentation that's prepared that they go through the presentation and the points that they want to make. They can also do a 3-D lesson. They can pop up quizzes to all of the students, right there on the moon, and the students can go ahead and test their mastery of some of the information that's been shared with them. Our students can also go off into groups, wherever they are—if it's on the moon, for instance—to do some kind of a project or share information and do presentations. The technology is such that if the students are off in groups, on the moon, the teacher can go around to those different groups and see what they're talking about, but the different groups don't have to hear—it's spatial—the sound. It's really amazing the amount of things that can be done and the creativity of our teachers—who have already started, by the way. Our brand-new teachers started last week. They were trained in virtual reality and they are really over the moon excited about the

possibilities of teaching in VR.

Tuthill: Well, this is extraordinary. As you were talking, I kept thinking about my middle school and high school experiences—which were a long, long time ago—and we all had textbooks back then. I’m thinking this is a replacement for textbooks. I mean, in the future, we’re not going to have these old textbooks where you read about these kinds of things in sort of 2-D flat page pieces of paper. But instead of the textbooks, you literally will be able to have lessons where today we’re going to study the Moon. Tomorrow we’re going to study the Galapagos Islands and spend a couple of weeks talking about evolution—the way Darwin learned about evolution on the Galapagos Islands. Or we’re gonna go to Yellowstone and understand the geology of Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon. Am I right about this? Is this basically the next generation of what used to be textbooks? A two-dimensional experience of these things, now it’s literally a three-dimensional experience where you’re actually there experiencing it with your teacher.

Donalds: Well, I think it actually allows for multi-dimensional learning to take place all in the same classroom. A lot of our classroom experiences are you’ll do some pre-reading in the virtual textbooks—the digital textbooks I should say—that we’ve created. Then, you’ll go into the headset and have a live learning experience with your teacher. It’s going to reinforce what you read and make it more practical. Then, you’re going to have an assessment that determines how well you’ve retained that information. I think it doesn’t necessarily

take away from reading—we are all going to continue to study information—but what the studies have shown is that when you have that reinforcement of that immersive experience, students are retaining more information, more quickly and for longer periods of time. It’s going to make the learning more effective and longer lasting, as well as really addressing some of the distractions that are in our schools right now that are very much affecting those with attention deficits and other special needs—the VR has tremendous potential for those types of students as well. But for all students, these studies have really shown to enhance the learning tremendously.

We did a pilot program out in California with fifth grade science students, and we covered an entire semester of information, with mastery, in six weeks of VR learning. The teacher that was associated with this pilot project was just amazed at how quickly the students would pick up the standards and be able to be assessed on those standards over and over again, retaining that information when they are taught in VR or the information that they have read is reinforced in VR.

Tuthill: Learning by doing, in kinesthetic learning, is an important part. You don’t get a lot of that in a traditional school system. I want to ask you a business question, because history is littered with the people who are first dying on the battlefield, because people that come after the first people tend to oftentimes be more successful. When you’re first, you’re experimenting, people are hesitant. Have you experienced that? Clearly, in my view at least, this is the

future. Clearly, you are the first into the future. You're sort of our version of Neil Armstrong, in terms of the kind of very dynamic learning environment you're creating. How have you thought about the business side of this? I mean, you're so new - you're taking a risk to get out there ahead of everybody else. I'm just curious, how are you managing that?

Donalds: It's a great question, because we did run into more resistance to this than we expected—even from those who are already committed to virtual learning in two dimensions. We thought that would be an easy conversion. We have a high-quality curriculum, we have better technology and we thought that's a no brainer. With something new and different it is always difficult to convince people to be the first. I think something unique about us is that while we are the first doing a VR school, we are not new to delivering high-quality classical education. We have four existing schools; we have a great reputation and great results there and long waiting lists. We've been doing it in person very well. We did it very well when we did it remotely during COVID and have the results to prove that. While we're using a different delivery model in terms of VR, we're doing the same thing we were doing before in a different way and with a different way of delivering it.

Of course, all these VR experiences that we're talking about are enhancing that high-quality liberal arts classical education, but we have a track record of what's most important about this, which is the curriculum. The technology is not what is really making a difference for kids. We've seen technology

come and go and everyone gets really excited about it and it really doesn't make a huge difference because technology is just the delivery method. The secret sauce truly is the classical method of education behind the VR technology. I believe that we have the best assembled team combining the greatest minds of classical education with the innovators of virtual reality and virtual reality education in K12. I don't know, I think it'd be very difficult for anyone to assemble a team of that level of talent—in any short period of time—to really catch up with what we've been able to do. I think—you know me—I'm a very aggressive entrepreneur, we are already working on multiple states to be the public option, maybe their only virtual public option. Some states have not even ventured into that realm yet and we're looking at those states. But for those who have the virtual option available, we want to be an alternative to two dimensions in zoom school or asynchronous learning and really provide a classical education option for every single family in the United States.

Tuthill: So there are some other groups out there trying to do some pretty cool stuff and doing some pretty cool stuff. I'm curious about the relationships that you might have formed. I had a previous conversation about this. I know that our friend Julie Young, who started FLVS, is now at Arizona State University—that's sort of widely seen as the most innovative university in the country. They're doing all kinds of amazing things throughout that university, but she's also doing some great stuff in K-12. They've just formed a partnership with Khan Academy who obviously has been trying to do

some stuff. Have you formed any of those partnerships yet? What have you thought about any of that? What's that look like to you?

Donalds: We haven't formed any formal partnerships with Arizona State University and their virtual program FLVS—Florida Virtual School. Great Hearts has a great online program, but we've been in conversations with all of them. The way I've always been with the schools is I'm such a proponent of school choice and education freedom, that I am all about helping one another and finding ways that we can work together to help kids. It's really the work of my life. It's my heart's work and my life's work, it's not a competition to me. We can all work together and find ways to meet the needs of students and families across the country. The more the merrier. There's plenty of room in this education freedom space for lots of players, lots of innovation and I want to see all of them succeed. We just had Curtis Fuller from Great Hearts Online, the superintendent there, speak at our teacher training conference. Those are the types of friendships that we have across the spectrum when it comes to not just virtual learning but classical learning and other school choice initiatives. I think we're all really working to help each other innovate and help as many students and families as possible.

Tuthill: I know you've talked to us in the past; I think we did an interview with you on ReimaginED about the work you're doing, and we talked some about ESAs. But I want to go back to that topic because Education Savings Accounts—which give families way more flexibility to spend their dollars—also open up some interesting business opportunities. You mentioned people can purchase classes from you so I assume that the ESA movement in Florida and around the country is also something that you have your eye on because that means you can unbundle some of your services and sell them piecemeal. Talk to me about that. Is that part of your business plan? Do you see this train coming in you know that there's going to be ESAs across the country? In Fall 2023, we'll probably have over 300,000 kids on ESAs in Florida. They'll have probably about \$1.7 billion in ESA funding in the state. How do you see that as an educational entrepreneur?

Donalds: I'm so excited for the ESA movement and not because I now have a virtual reality school that people can purchase, but because I've been advocating for Universal ESAs for the past almost 10 years now as the future of education choice. I envision a future of education where families can customize the entire education experience for their children. They can have a virtual reality science class and a paper book

mathematics class that their very intelligent homeschool mom wants to teach. Maybe the local museum does a civics course for them and that's where they get that. I would really like to see—using the ESA model—families be able to fully customize the education experience to meet the needs of their children, including being able to purchase special services and tutoring—which we're also looking to provide. We're very excited about the expansion of ESAs, of course, in my home state of Florida. We want to be a

part of that and be a part of providing those services. We're certainly talking to Arizona. I feel strongly that we need to go to Arizona to reward them for being the ones to do universal ESAs and provide the supply for the demand that we know is coming when those are rolled out. Across the country, we're definitely going to be continuing to advocate for universal ESAs and then being part of the education freedom solutions for families.



Politics, Playgrounds, and Public Ledgers:

The Political Obstacles that Regulatory Sandboxes Face and How to Overcome Them

Ron Shultis

Introduction: Everyone Wants to Play in the Sandbox

There's a saying around most professional sports that it's all a "copycat league." Take, for example, the NFL: in 2008, the Miami Dolphins started running trick plays out of the "wildcat formation" with Ronnie Brown and Ricky Williams, most notably using the formation in a 38-13 upset over the New England Patriots. After the Dolphins' initial

success, other teams began instituting wildcat plays into their offenses looking to gain a competitive edge over unsuspecting defenses. However, professional sports are not the only "copycat league" and, arguably, not even the best. Our 50 states are infamous for copying the laws and policies of others, looking to create jobs by remaining competitive for investment and businesses seeking to expand or relocate.

One of the newest policies catching fire across the states, especially as they seek to jump-start their economies in a post-COVID world, is to foster and recruit innovative technologies, start-ups, and entrepreneurs through a regulatory sandbox.

Regulatory sandboxes are programs to assist innovative entrepreneurs and small business owners as they test, try, and launch new technologies and products by providing temporary relief from archaic regulations that would otherwise make it difficult or impossible to get products or businesses off the ground.¹ Regulations often serve as a barrier to entry for new companies and technologies. According to the National Small Business Association, the average cost of regulations for a business in its first year is more than \$83,000.² Regulatory sandboxes offer a way to curtail the barriers to entry for innovative businesses and allow them to scale up and grow without the need for difficult broad regulatory reform.³

Sandboxes have a promising track record. A study of the world's first sandbox, the United Kingdom's Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) created in 2016, found that of the 700 FCA participants, 80 percent were still in business and 40 percent of them saw a reduction in time to get to market.⁴ Another study found FCA participating companies were 50 percent more likely to obtain investment funding and would receive 15 percent more funding than nonparticipants.⁵

Since Arizona created the first state regulatory sandbox in 2018 focusing on financial technology companies ("fintech"), the idea has spread like wildfire, with ten states creating 17 different sandbox programs

in just a few short years.⁶ While regulatory sandboxes started almost exclusively in the fintech space, the concept has been applied to as diverse areas as digital medical technology in Wyoming, property technology in Arizona and, most notably, Utah's first-ever universal sandbox that covers the entire regulatory scope of the state.

It's Hard to Play Nice: Political Obstacles

While many states have looked to create regulatory sandbox programs, that doesn't mean sandboxes don't have their detractors. In fact, the majority of sandbox proposals have failed, with dozens of sandbox legislative proposals filed since 2018.⁷ For example, when the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau sought to create a regulatory sandbox at the federal level, it received considerable pushback, with over 80 advocacy groups from a wide variety of backgrounds writing to oppose the idea.⁸ Additionally, over 20 state attorneys general similarly opposed the proposal, with New York AG Letitia James asserting she rejected the notion "that innovation can only be fostered by permitting companies to evade the law."⁹

State proposals have likewise encountered resistance. For example, despite fintech sandboxes often focusing on encouraging innovations that bring new financial products and services to small businesses and those typically underserved, Illinois's chapter of Small Business Majority opposed the fintech sandbox proposal in Illinois in 2019.¹⁰ The next year, the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation argued in a report that the state should not pursue a regulatory sandbox due to

consumer protection fears and instead advocated that the state pursue Special-Purpose Depository Charters (SPDIs) similar to Wyoming.¹¹ One writer for the *Financial Times* compared sandboxes to nothing more than a “publicity stunt.”¹²

Even if a governor’s administration proposes a regulatory sandbox, it’s no guarantee of success. During the 2020 legislative session in Tennessee, the Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance, the regulatory agency responsible for regulating the insurance industry and all commerce-related licensed professions, had the “Licensing Innovation Act” introduced as part of Gov. Bill Lee’s agenda.¹³ However, the proposal was ultimately defeated due to push back from professional associations like the TN Society of Professional Engineers and Home Builders of Tennessee. In 2021, my organization, the Beacon Center of Tennessee, and our sister advocacy organization, Beacon Impact, worked on a revised and improved version of the 2020 legislation with the “Innovation FastTrack Act.”¹⁴ The new bill faced similar opposition, this time from additional organizations like the Tennessee Funeral Directors Association, who was concerned that the sandbox could be used for “virtual funerals” or could inadvertently spread disease with dead bodies. Never mind the fact that the bill prohibited sandbox participants being exempted from regulations that would endanger public health and safety, and events like virtual weddings and memorial services had already become common because of the pandemic.

If policy advocates or organizations wish to create a regulatory sandbox in their

state, what are some ways to overcome the political hurdles sandbox proposals typically face? When looking at the lessons in other states, advocates should consider two avenues: identifying champions and building business community support.

King of the Hill: Identifying and Creating Champions

One of the inherent drawbacks in advocating for a regulatory sandbox from a political standpoint is that there will rarely be a constituency who immediately benefits from the proposal. One idea in public choice theory explains how government inefficiencies develop when there are concentrated benefits and diffused costs. Regulatory sandboxes face a compounded version of this. Not only do incumbent firms and industries benefit from the current regulatory environment and therefore wish to prevent new innovative firms from entering the marketplace, the benefits of sandboxes, the new products, and services for consumers from innovative entrepreneurs often do not exist yet. So when policymakers and legislators ask who benefits from such proposals, the difficult answer is often: “We don’t know yet.” At best, one can point to how a sandbox could have helped with the dilemmas some entrepreneurs faced in the past.¹⁵ Because of this paradox, it is important for sandbox advocates to identify passionate policy champions who can articulate the vision of a proposal and its future benefits.

In fact, the first ever sandbox in the United States, Arizona’s Fintech Sandbox, was the effort of a policy champion looking to spearhead the idea: the state attorney general. Arizona’s AG at the time, Mark

Brnovich, first made the case for a state regulatory sandbox in an op-ed in the *American Banker* in 2017.¹⁶ Within the AG's office, the Civil Litigation Division lead Paul Watkins helped design and administer the program and would later go on to lead the Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Office of Innovation.¹⁷ Watkins would take his experience in Arizona and go on to propose three tools the CFPB could use to facilitate innovation: renovated no-action letters, and the federal government's first two sandboxes—a product and disclosure sandbox. While these proposals would go on to receive the previously mentioned criticisms, Watkins argued how sandboxes help regulators to better understand new innovations, facilitate innovation, and increase access to all consumers, but particularly underserved communities.¹⁸

Arguably, no state has mastered the idea of using policy champions to drive change more than Wyoming, which has become a leader on innovation issues, especially related to cryptocurrencies. In the past few years, the state has passed over a dozen laws, including a fintech sandbox and a sandbox focused on digital medical technologies, to make Wyoming the epicenter for cryptocurrency and blockchain investment and development. This effort started as the brainchild between state representative Tyler Lindholm and Caitlin Long, a former executive at Morgan Stanley from Wyoming back in 2017.¹⁹ Rep. Lindholm and other stakeholders urged the state legislature to create the Wyoming Blockchain Task Force, the brain trust of the state's crypto-focused legislative proposals. In 2020, after the numerous successes of the task

force, legislative leaders made the task force a permanent committee.²⁰ Despite focusing on such a new and innovative technology, Wyoming serves as an example of how one policymaker willing to champion an issue can create enough buy-in and interest in a new and difficult subject for a state usually associated with cowboys and ranchers to be a technology leader in the span of a few short years.

Field of Dreams: Building Business Engagement

Another way for policymakers and advocates to overcome the political hurdles regulatory sandboxes face is to build a coalition of support from broadly focused business organizations and communities to counteract the opposition from specific industries and organizations. These types of organizations can speak to the wide economic benefits of boosting entrepreneurship and a favorable regulatory environment. For example, when Utah was considering its industry-agnostic sandbox in 2021, the measure was supported by both Silicon Slopes, a non-profit that represents Utah's growing startup and tech community, and the Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce, which testified in support of the bill. The bill was passed unanimously in part due to its strong business community support.²¹ Earlier this year, the Missouri legislature considered a bill that would have made it only the second state to pass an industry-agnostic sandbox. Despite skepticism from environmental groups, the state's Chamber of Commerce and the Associated Industries of Missouri supported the measure.²² While the bill was unable to pass both Chambers

before the legislature adjourned for the year, the measure passed the state House of Representatives with overwhelming majorities, which was no small feat.²³

But if advocates are unable to garner much industry and business community support, what are they to do? Build their own business community. After unsuccessfully trying to advocate for a regulatory sandbox in Tennessee in both the 2020 and 2021 legislative sessions, supporters are trying a new approach. In January of 2022, the Beacon Center created an “Entrepreneurship and Innovation Council” made up of over a dozen influential entrepreneurs and business owners from across the state. The Council’s members come from a wide variety of sectors such as finance, blockchain, healthcare, venture capital, and retail. More than a sounding board, the Council is meeting throughout 2022 to hear from national experts on different policies and to discuss the policies and reforms needed to make Tennessee a leader in entrepreneurship and innovation in the decades to come. To date, members of the Council have heard from experts from the Mercatus Center on the idea of permissionless innovation and the principles of sound public policy, from The James Madison Institute on how states can and should lead on innovation policy, and from the Tax Foundation on the intricacies of corporate tax policy and its impact on different industry sectors and how states can incentivize economic growth through

tax reform. The Entrepreneurship and Innovation Council going forward will be researching the specific policies necessary to make Tennessee a leader in:

1. **Tax and Regulatory Policy:** Despite being a no-income-tax state, what tax reforms and regulatory reforms, like a regulatory sandbox, would ensure Tennessee has the best general business environment in the country?
2. **Barriers to Entry:** How can the state and local governments make it easier for new entrepreneurs and the smallest of businesses to launch quickly and effortlessly and ensure compliance with required regulations?
3. **Healthcare:** The city of Nashville is already a leader in the healthcare services industry, with industry giants like HCA, Vanderbilt, and Healthstream located here. What policies would facilitate Tennessee being the leader in other aspects of healthcare such as telemedicine, pharmaceuticals, and research and development?
4. **Logistics:** Tennessee is already a major player in transportation and logistics, uniquely located within the heartland of the country. With Fortune 500 giant FedEx based out of Memphis, how can Tennessee become the leader in

innovations in shipping and logistics technology like autonomous vehicles, drones, and smart highways?

5. **Blockchain:** While states like Wyoming and cities like Miami have sought to create hubs focused on cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, with one of the fastest-growing tech workforces in the country, how can Tennessee, and specifically Nashville, become the hub for the development of new applications of blockchain technology in other sectors?

At the end of the year, the Council will present its recommendations to legislative leadership and the governor's administration in time for the start of the 2023 legislative session. Having these policy recommendations coming from a group of entrepreneurs without any previous policy or political experience will accomplish two goals. First, sandboxes and other innovation policies are sometimes viewed as too far-fetched or theoretical, the brainchildren of think-tanks in ivory towers. But by having real Tennessee business owners researching, coming up with, and proposing these solutions, it will add legitimacy to how these policies truly empower entrepreneurs and innovators because the solutions are coming from people who have built successful businesses and who know what it takes. Second, we will have created a cohort of business leaders invested in

educating state lawmakers and policymakers about these proposals and the benefits to Tennessee. Ideally, the business leaders on the Council will also share these ideas and proposals with other business leaders throughout their community, expanding the network of individual business owners advocating for these policies and innovations even if more traditional business advocacy groups decide not to engage.

Conclusion: Playing Chess Instead of Checkers

Regulatory sandboxes are arguably one of the most exciting public policy innovations in recent memory. Sandboxes provide a mechanism for regulatory flexibility in the environment of an ever-growing government and administrative state, helping to ensure innovative products and services are not stomped out before ever launching. While they help innovators and regulators work together, they can also provide data to lawmakers about laws and regulations in need of reform or repeal. Despite this, regulatory sandboxes in many jurisdictions have faced opposition from concerns about consumer protection and environmental damage or merely due to the anti-competitive nature of legacy industries and businesses.

When designing a regulatory sandbox program, there are best practices for advocates to consider from a policy perspective. For example, advocates should consider how to reduce legitimate consumer protection

fears and ensure the sandbox is as accessible as possible to prevent governments providing one firm with an unfair government granted advantage. However, due to the public choice imbalances sandboxes face, first, and perhaps more importantly, is for innovation advocates to consider the political questions and obstacles they are likely to face. Successful proposals in other states show a history of either policy champions who were more than just open to the idea

but worked to drive change within their communities, or engagement and support from business advocacy groups and organizations. And if no other supporters or champions exist, advocates can always build their own.

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How Biden's Title IX Changes Will Destroy Parental Rights and Force

Gender Ideology Into Our Schools

January Littlejohn

Covid allowed parents to see firsthand and in real time the deterioration of parental rights that had actually been occurring in our public schools for decades.

Outside of the mask issue, an even darker agenda was uncovered relating to gender ideology overtaking our public-school

policies and protocols and cutting parents out of critical conversations occurring with their children.

The Florida Legislature and Governor Ron DeSantis have been making strides to further protect and restore parental rights in our schools and get gender ideology out of our classrooms. But this progress is all

about to come to a crashing halt if Biden's proposed Title IX changes are implemented.

I know this firsthand because our 13-year-old daughter was socially transitioned by her middle school through creating and implementing a Transgender/Gender Nonconforming Support Plan without our knowledge or consent. These "gender support plans," instituted at schools without parental consent, allow children to choose an alternate name, pronoun, restroom, locker room, sports team, and which sex they will room with on overnight field trips. And all of this happens with multiple school officials present, but no parent.

When I asked the school what had occurred in this private meeting they had with my daughter, I was told by school officials they could not give me any information about what had occurred at the meeting and that my daughter's privacy was protected by a non-discrimination law.

After months of research, I learned this was not an isolated incident and that schools all over our state and our country had strategically implemented guidelines or policies that cut out all parents with no due process from their child's gender social transition at school. These guidelines in place around the country shared eerily similar language, citing the "outing" of children to their parents as dangerous or abusive to the child.

Social transitioning is a psychosocial medical intervention that schools are grossly unqualified to initiate or implement, but especially without parental involvement. Social transition is also the first step toward medical transition, which can have life-long negative physical and

psychological consequences. But yet, most schools throughout our country have these protocols in place, claiming children have a right to privacy from their parents.

In response to these LGBTQ guides that direct schools to blatantly violate parental rights, the Florida Legislature took steps this year to make parental authority even more clear, and built upon the rights afforded to parents in the U.S. Constitution. Simply stated, parents have a fundamental right to direct the upbringing of their children, which includes decisions impacting their child's physical and mental health. They passed the Parental Rights in Education bill earlier this year, and Governor DeSantis signed it into law over the summer.

Now, the Biden administration is proposing changes to Title IX that will usurp parental authority and mandate this social transitioning policy in every school, college and university that receives federal funding.

Title IX of the Education Amendments was enacted by Congress in 1972 to eliminate discrimination based upon sex against girls and women in particular, in education. Title IX states:

"No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

On July 12, 2022, the U.S. Department of Education published in the Federal Register a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to rewrite the federal regulations that implement Title IX which **expand the scope of**

Title IX, without Congressional approval, to include prohibiting “*discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity*.”

The proposed expansion of the term “sex-based discrimination” to include “gender identity” will have devastating consequences on parental rights, female sports and single-sex spaces.

At the same time the Biden administration is proposing this significant change to Title IX, our country is seeing an explosion in young girls suddenly experiencing distress over their sex and identifying as transgender with no previous history of gender confusion. This explosion is a result of gender ideology that has permeated almost every aspect of our culture, including the internet, entertainment, social media, our schools and our government.

Children are being taught that they choose their gender identity from a menu of options and that this choice is independent from their biological reality. Many of these gender identities are very regressive in nature and are often based on gender stereotypes. There is no longer a coherent definition of the word “transgender.” A transgender identity now means whatever the child wants it to mean, based on a feeling and self-identification of any discordant gender identity.

Teaching gender ideology to impressionable young children and teens is a form of indoctrination, causing confusion where no previous confusion existed. The resulting gender dysphoria is being normalized as a natural part of adolescent development instead of being treated as a true mental health issue.

This population of children and teens swept up in the social contagion of a gender identity crisis will only be affirmed by school officials in whatever gender identity they choose if the new Title IX rule is adopted. Additionally, a school’s failure to affirm a student in a new gender identity will be presumed as causing *harm* to the child and will be considered discrimination.

To use a child’s birth name and pronouns after they’ve identified as transgender will become *Title IX-based harassment*. The fear of harassment and loss of federal funding will compel schools to affirm a child’s declared identity in every case, without question, and without parental notification or consent.

But what if affirming a child’s gender identity is not in the best interest of the child? The Florida Department of Health recently came out with new guidelines that recommend against the social and medical transition of minors. The protocol for treating gender dysphoria in children, they recommend, is “watchful waiting.”

Under the “watchful waiting” protocol, parents give the child a neutral environment without social or medical transitioning, and sometimes including therapy to work through any co-occurring issues that may be contributing to or are at the root cause of the distress. Research reveals upwards of 80 percent of these children will outgrow their gender distress during or shortly after puberty.

The truth is we don’t know which child will detransition and which child may persist in their belief that they are born in the wrong body. There is no test for this. This is why we are seeing the detransition

population growing by the day. The detransitioner is an individual who was affirmed in their gender identity, medically transitioned and came to regret the irreversible consequences of transition and began the process of transitioning back to their actual sex.

Many detransitioners are reporting that they were only affirmed in their chosen gender identity and encouraged along a path of social and medical transition to later realize that gender transition was not the solution to their underlying distress. Many of these adolescents are truly in distress but have misdiagnosed their distress as an issue of gender identity. The co-occurring issues may include sexual or physical trauma, eating disorders, self-harm, anxiety, depression, a history of bullying and, for up to 40 percent, being on the autism spectrum. When children are simply affirmed in a transgender identity, these underlying mental health issues often go unchecked and unresolved, or can even be exacerbated by the identity.

No state will be safe from these changes to Title IX regulations. The laws that states have enacted to protect female sports and parental rights will be useless because federal law supersedes state law.

Other consequences to the new Title IX regulations include requiring schools to open their restrooms and locker rooms to students based on their gender self-identification, which poses an issue of safety for all parties involved.

Lastly, these changes pose a threat to religious freedom and speech in favor of gender indoctrination.

Many are concerned these changes will open the door to even more gender ideology indoctrination under the guise of non-discrimination in our schools.

Now is not the time to take the foot off the gas. The fight to restore our parental rights in schools and keep our society — and our children — tethered to biological reality is just beginning.

For more information and resources regarding these proposed new regulations, see www.childparentrights.org/title-ix/

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Using Technology to Solve Problems of Policy: The Case of Urbit

Andrea O'Sullivan

Technology policy, particularly that which considers third-party platforms, was something of a niche pursuit for much of the early millennium. Intellectual property considerations briefly punctuated the public consciousness with the rise of file-sharing platforms such as Napster in the early 2000s.¹ Other than that, most people thought very little of the laws and norms that govern the internet.

This includes technology companies themselves, many of which did not even have much of a dedicated policy operation until relatively recently. When I arrived in Washington, DC in 2011, the total number of dedicated technology policy staffers employed by large technology outfits could probably be counted in the dozens.

Companies like Google and Facebook were famously disdainful of politicking and lobbying,² preferring instead to mostly ignore Washington. Amazon only spent some \$3 million on lobbying in 2013;³ today, it is closer to \$20 million.⁴ This is before even getting into the rich ecosystem of nonprofits and educational ventures that these companies support to encourage debate around these issues⁵—to say nothing of the many mirror groups founded to attack technology companies.⁶

It was a matter of time. As technology platforms grew in size and influence, government policies were sure to sharpen. These companies understandably want to limit the negative impacts that laws can have on their bottom lines and customer

experiences.

Technology policy has become something of a kitchen table conversation, as well. Most people use some kind of social media platform every day. The policies that these companies (and the governments that govern them) set to control content on their websites has a dramatic effect on people's everyday lives. A simple algorithm change can upend a business's entire marketing strategy. The kinds of content that is promoted or demoted can greatly influence our moods, information diets, and even worldviews. Platforms now have the power to limit the voice of a sitting U.S. president. It is expected that people would talk about these things.

As such, many Americans have strong opinions on topics that were only a few short years ago the domain of a handful of oddball technologists. We live in a world where one's position on Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act can mark them as a populist hero or an establishment holdout. This has brought a blurring of the finer contours of the policy discussion. Being "against Section 230" is shorthand for being "against Big Tech," regardless of whether or not that position would help Big Tech about as much as it would hurt non-mainstream voices.

The issues that underlie such sloganeering are very well founded. The design of technology is of great import for user sovereignty.⁷ Centralized platforms imply centralized control of content, data, and even behavior. So far, most of the conversation has focused on higher level laws to influence those technological controls. Alas, the effort needed to change these laws is great, and it is not clear that simple-seeming

remedies such as "repealing Section 230" would bring about the ends intended by activists.

The good news is technological alternatives exist that attack the problem at the root. These projects seek to rewrite how computers communicate so that users are endowed with more sovereignty by design.⁸

This sounds ambitious, and it is. But these are not merely theoretical pursuits. One of the boldest projects to redesign online networking from scratch exists and works today.

Urbis is a strong case study in the possible future of decentralized general-purpose computing.⁹ While other projects have valiantly sought to innovate around established computing paradigms, most notably by creating more decentralized protocols such as the Fediverse ecosystem, they usually keep the established server-client model of networking intact.

The thesis of Urbis is that it is precisely the Unix-based server-client system that encourages economies of scale towards cloud computing and therefore industrial-scale data centers and third-party controlled platforms and services.¹⁰ Urbis provides a from-scratch deterministic operating system (OS) and networking architecture that allows each computer to serve as its own personal server.¹¹

Let's break that down.

The roots of our contemporary computing experience sprung forth from the fertile grounds of Bell Labs, which partnered with the minds at General Electric and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1969 to develop a time-sharing OS that would allow multiple users to access a mainframe at the same time.¹² The Multiplexed Information

and Computing System (Multics) that resulted eventually gave way to the Uniplexed Information Computing Service, a backronym play on words typical of computer scientists to sound like “eunuchs,” or “Unix.”¹³ Unix was unveiled to the public at the 1973 Association of Computing Machinery symposium¹⁴ and quickly became popular for its introduction of multi-user access as well as hierarchical file system management, asynchronous processing, portability from being written in a high-level language called C, and built-in networking capabilities.¹⁵

This system was a paradigm shift in how computers could talk to each other. Developers could now easily collaborate on building computer programs. The client-server model that separates information providers (servers) and requesters (clients) married the Unix programming environment to afford a more decentralized computer experience. Unix spread in popularity among academic and research communities through new versions such as Berkeley Software Distribution (BSD) and Linux, before eventually becoming a standard of commercial offerings for the broader public, such as Apple’s Mac OS X.

This commercialization, and the general process of onboarding the public into networked computing, implies great scale. Expert computer users at well-capitalized institutions can run a server the way they want much more easily than someone like me. Today, motivated hobbyists can likewise run their own servers for things like email and media, but it is not too common.

Mostly, people outsource such operations to third parties. This is part of why

companies like Meta, Alphabet, Microsoft, and Apple have grown so successful. It is too complicated for most people to run their own music server that their devices (clients) can access. Rather, they purchase a subscription with Apple Music or YouTube Music that streams it over the internet. We don’t set up servers with our photos and videos that we can share to the world. We post them to our Facebook and Instagram pages for our friends and family to see. Most of us don’t even really set up our own webpages anymore where we could rant to the world about whatever political topic we want. We have third-party hosted websites managed through third-party run publishing platforms and perhaps monetized through third-party payment services. Each of these third parties affords one more lever of control by which we can potentially be deplatformed.

Some projects aim to route around deplatforming by building tools to make it easier or clearer to run one’s own server to access a service.¹⁶ This is the model of projects like Mastodon, Matrix, and XMPP.¹⁷ Users can opt to run their own server to host chat and media, or use a third-party server, like a friend’s, or use one provided by the service itself. Servers can choose which users and other servers to connect with or blacklist. This allows some degree of private moderation and dispute resolution within the service community.

However, it is unrealistic to expect most people to “be their own servers” in the dominant computing environment as a response to the deplatforming problem. It is for this reason that many alternatives to large tech platforms struggle to find a user base. It is



simply not easy or intuitive to use these alternatives. The payoff is unclear and all of their friends are on large platforms anyway. Why go through the hassle of setting up a server for a network that very few people will use?

This is where Urbit comes in. Its founder, computer programmer and homebrew political theorist,¹⁸ Curtis G. Yarvin, has characterized the project as the way one might build a networking environment if we were to start from scratch today. An early internet adopter himself, Yarvin believes that the Unix and HTTP-based internet served well the needs of the 100,000 or so sophisticated academics and researchers that constituted the initial user base. But it “doesn’t scale for human beings.”¹⁹

The Urbit platform is a personal server

and clean-slate decentralized software stack. It consists of an operating function, Nock, and functional language, Hoon, that allow one’s Urbit to “think.” On top of these are built the operating system, Arvo, and a few in-built features: an encrypted p2p network, typed revision control system, functional build system, application sandbox, and a vault for personal files. It is a complete OS and networking environment written in 30,000 lines of code.

Crucially, your Urbit essentially condenses client and server into one unit. Each Urbit is its own server which can interact directly with any other Urbit. This is baked into the code; users don’t need to go out of their way to set up and maintain private servers for whatever needs they have. Someone like me can behave as if we were

sophisticated system administrators merely by booting up our Urbit.

Many benefits follow. For starters, this design affords user sovereignty. Individuals are no longer at the whim of one of a handful of large companies that set one-size-fits-all policies that may be arbitrarily enforced to incentivize mostly bland, commercially friendly, or politically correct content. Data privacy issues are also addressed, as large entities no longer control mega datasets of personal data that can be leaked or cut off from users. If you don't like the policies of another Urbit, you can simply choose to not associate with them (and vice versa). Furthermore, if another Urbit decides to not associate with you, they cannot cut you off from your own data in removing their association, as is the case when a user is deplatformed by a third party and can no longer access their content and contacts from that account.

This does not imply anarchy. The flip side of a lax moderation policy is usually that filthy content will accrue. On Urbit, there is a cost to poor behavior. There are a limited number of Urbits that are usually costly to acquire. Some rarer kinds of Urbits have authentication and routing duties: these are galaxies (255 total) and stars (65,000 total). Then there are planets (4 billion total) and moons (4.3 trillion total), which can access and use the Urbit network. Each of these Urbits comes with a persistent public identity. If a user engages in trolling, criminal activity, or abuse, they will be identified and ostracized. Furthermore, they will incur a financial loss, as their reputation will be ruined. This is how content moderation problems can be addressed without ill-fitting

and abusable corporate or government interventions.

Urbit is a virtual machine for distributed environments. It is like a browser that allows one to interact directly with other computers. As Bitcoin made it possible for individuals to send value directly to each other, Urbit makes it possible for computers to interface directly.

One can find many critiques of Urbit online. It is an ambitious project; some believe it is too ambitious.²⁰ Every few years, a new project will spring forth to “rebuild the internet.” Much of the web3 hype leverages this perennial quest.²¹ There are many technical debates over the merits of some of the design choices. Aesthetically, Urbit is unique even when compared to other functional programming environments.²² (It is very likely your eyes glazed over as I described the system design.) Yarvin describes the project as “programming for Martians”: the way an alien civilization might design their networking infrastructure.²³ Critics maintain this will keep interested developers away. Ideologically, some opponents dislike the founder's right-leaning politics.²⁴

What cannot be said is that Urbit does not work. It exists, functions, and maintains a small but dedicated user base. Many ventures have launched on Urbit, such as Tirrel, Uqbar, Wexpert Systems, Third-Earth, dcSpark, and Holium—my husband is employed full time as an Urbit developer and has worked with many of these groups. Building on Urbit is a holistic endeavor; as with Unix in the late 1970s, the environment is built in a way so that a developer like my husband has most everything he needs within the Urbit ecosystem. And as

with Unix, if this endeavor does take off, it could reshape computing for years to come.

It is more likely that it will fail. This essay does not argue that this particular project will be the one to solve the problems that technology policy attempts to remediate—although I certainly hope it does. Rather, the point is that technology can be a more potent tool to address problems than policy.

Bitcoin is an example of a technology that solved many longstanding problems surrounding monetary policy, financial surveillance, and individual sovereignty. Attempting to tackle these through law would have taken significant time and resources for an uncertain, if even possible, payoff. Technology solved these at once without permission or apology.

Policymakers and shapers interested in securing more sovereignty online would do well to educate themselves and perhaps

use and support the kinds of projects that seek to achieve their ends. Urbit is a good example of a promising project to decentralize the internet. But as mentioned, not all projects which claim to do this actually *do*—there are many scams and vaporware as well.

The futurist Buckminster Fuller famously stated: “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.” There is value in fighting bad laws in policy. But many underrate the value of building such new models that make these fights irrelevant. Urbit is one attempt to do that.

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Leaving the Classroom to Start a School — Teachers Who Made the Move *Step Up for Students*

Michael Q. McShane & James Shuls

Most conversations about school choice focus on students and families, and for good reason. School choice allows parents to choose the best educational opportunities for their children without having to make financial sacrifices for tuition or move to another district. But there is another important group that benefits from school choice: teachers.

Recently, we served as advisers on

research conducted by Florida's Step Up For Students that explored what led a small, varied group of teachers to leave their posts in traditional public schools and strike out on their own to start new private schools. Leaving pay, pensions and the security of a public school job, they tapped into resources provided by Florida's rich school choice environment to create new educational opportunities. What these teachers had to say

can shed light on ways to support further innovation in education.

The 10 teachers-turned-school founders were an interesting bunch. On average, they had spent a decade in traditional schools. Three founded large private schools (serving more than 150 students), three started small private schools (serving up to 150 students), and the others created a microschool, a hybrid homeschool, a homeschool co-op and a learning pod. Four of the schools were specifically for students with special needs.

All 10 had their own reasons for opening a new school, but frustration was a common theme. Whether it was low academic standards, the ever-present shadow of standardized testing or having to watch students fall through the cracks, all felt they could not remain in a system that they thought wasn't working. As one put it, "As a special education teacher in the public school system, I saw my students ... going into middle school, and a lot of them were not receiving services. They were going into classrooms where there was no one helping them to organize or to understand the different things that were going on. That's when we started to really seriously talk about how we would do our own school."

It hasn't been easy. Starting a new school is rife with challenges.

First, to start a new private school on their own in an uncertain world, the founders had to give up a decent, steady paycheck and all the benefits of a traditional teaching post. They then had to convince other teachers to give up that same stability to join them. They could not promise the same job security, salary, and benefits; they could

only argue that their colleagues would be joining something that was worthwhile and could work.

There are also all the practical difficulties of starting any new organization. Things like building codes and zoning restrictions are difficult for people with no experience to navigate. As one teacher put it, "I know education inside and out. But I don't know anything about business. I started the journey with a *Nonprofits for Dummies* and a bottle of wine at 2 o'clock in the morning at my kitchen table. Because I know that if my son needs this, there are so many other kids that need this."

One thing that was not a challenge was demand. From the word go, families and students were interested in what these new school founders were offering. As one put it, "We did not market, really, at all this year. We put nothing on Facebook, nothing on anything about enrollment, and I had over 200 people that applied." Another said, "Initially, I planned to start with about 60 kids. That was my goal. But we ended up starting with over 200 kids during that first year." Said another, "I have 16 families on my waiting list. So, advertising would put me way above what I would be able to handle."

One key factor was the role of Florida's private school choice programs, which made it possible for middle- and lower-income families to enroll. Around 70 percent of Florida public school students are eligible for one of the state's income-based scholarships, worth \$7,700 per year. Florida also offers an education savings account program specifically for students with special needs worth about \$10,000 per student. Multiple school founders stated that these

programs have made their school a possibility for families that otherwise would not have been able to attend.

So many passionate and talented educators feel trapped in a traditional school system that is failing them or their students. In Florida, however, some are striking out on their own and trying to create something new. With the right public policies and supportive private organizations, many more experienced educators could soon be creating new school models to serve the needs of students.

Policymakers and philanthropists can help by supporting choice programs, providing mentoring and networking

opportunities for school founders, and supporting educator entrepreneurs as they look for start-up capital and facilities. If teachers are to have the opportunity to build truly transformative school environments, these are the resources they will need.

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How a Caring Teacher— and School Choice!— Changed My Life

Ashley Elliott

When I started high school, I was going through serious issues. Like every other teen, I was worried about how I looked and what other people thought of me. As a child who was born addicted to drugs and lived below the poverty line, my worries were very different from those of my peers.

My worries as a teenager were about

whether the electricity would be on at home or whether my birthmother would be coming back into my life (only to leave again). I was worried about my grandmother, the one I call mom; she sacrificed all she could to provide for me and my siblings after selflessly adopting all three of us in her retirement years.

So much was going on at home, that

school really wasn't my first priority. My grades kept falling and my attitude towards everything got so much worse. I was rude and selfish; I cursed at my teachers, graffitied the walls, and skipped class frequently. I felt like everything in this world was out to get me, but many saw my behavior as a nuisance and not a cry for help.

One day, I got into a fight with another student who later stole my cell phone. I was distraught—my mom had saved for months to get that phone. When I got to my next class, a teacher that I liked asked me what was wrong. I told her that someone had taken my cell phone and I insisted that she let me leave so I could find it. She let me go, but of course the phone was gone by that time. When I came back into the class, my teacher stopped class and pulled me into a quiet room. She then said to me, “Ashley, I feel like you are upset about something more than just losing your cell phone.”

At that moment, I broke down and started crying. Then my teacher, Jennifer Perez, took me in her arms and held me while I sobbed for what felt like forever. In that moment, I felt like somebody actually understood me.

In addition to being my 9th and 10th grade English teacher, Mrs. Perez also became my mentor. She cared about me and kept me together when everything felt like it was falling apart. Her guidance helped me get back on the right path. However, near the end of my 10th grade year, she told me that she and my favorite principal, Mark Thomas, would be leaving to teach at another school.

I thought they were leaving me, and I didn't know what to do. It was then that Mrs. Perez asked if I wanted to go with them. She told me that they were going to Victory Christian Academy. I automatically said no; I was afraid that since it was a Christian school and I was not a believer, it would not be a right fit. Plus, I thought that it was going to be full of snobby rich kids who could never understand a person like me.

Mrs. Perez insisted that I give the school a try and she set up an interview at the school for me. I was accepted immediately, but then came the question of how I was going to pay. Victory is a private school, and my family barely had enough money for the bills, much less a private school.

However, the school informed me about a low-income scholarship to attend Victory, called Step up for Students. The scholarship allowed me to attend a school for which I would not otherwise have the money. When I was at my original high school, I can say that many teachers cared and really wanted to help the students there. However, the resources and the time outside of class that I needed were not something they could provide. It was difficult learning in that environment, and it was just not the right fit for me.

I flourished at Victory. My grades went up from Ds and Fs to As, Bs, and Cs within the first semester. By the second semester, and from that point on, I was an A-B student. Over half of the students there were also on the scholarship, so I never really felt out of place. I participated in my first sport,

became an honors student, and did something I hadn't thought possible two years prior... I graduated.

If Mrs. Perez had never shown me this school and the scholarship, I probably would have flunked out of high school, and I certainly would not have gone to college. It is thanks to that scholarship and Victory that I can now proudly say that I have graduated with my bachelor's degree in history from the University of Central Florida!

Victory was the right choice for me, and I am so thankful that I even had the choice. I had attended public schools and magnet schools my whole life and started failing

in middle school. Obviously, these schools weren't the right fit for me, but they may have been for somebody else.

At the end of the day, every student is different and therefore not every student will thrive under the same conditions or in the same environment. School choice gave me a chance. It put me on the road to success. And it should be available for every other student as well.

Ashley Elliott serves as the Future Leaders Fellowship Coordinator at the American Federation for Children.



JMI will begin featuring articles from each of the State University System schools over the coming issues. Kicking this off, hear from Florida's two flagship universities

Florida State University Continues to Succeed

Clay Ingram

Florida State University is proud to be part of the nation's No. 1 university system—a state system that is committed to across-the-board academic excellence and that prioritizes access and affordability.

The state's 12 public universities serve more than 300,000 students, giving Floridians access to a myriad of top-notch institutions that power the economy and produce groundbreaking research that touches lives

throughout our state and beyond.

As a Top 20 public university, Florida State University has worked tirelessly to ensure that our students succeed in and outside of the classroom, while also facilitating a world-class research environment.

President Richard McCullough has a bold vision of leading FSU to even greater heights. Inspired by FSU's rapid rise in the national academic rankings, commitment to student success, and role as an engine

of economic opportunity and social mobility, he's laid out ambitious goals for the university.

McCullough has reaffirmed the university's commitment to student success, which also has fueled our rapid rise in the *U.S. News & World Report* "Best Colleges" rankings. We have one of the highest four-year graduation rates in the nation at 74 percent and recently set a school record for six-year graduation rate at 85 percent. More importantly, we have eliminated graduation rate disparities across our diverse student body.

In recognition of our efforts, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities recently presented FSU with the Degree Completion Award—widely recognized as the nation's most prominent award for student success.

We're also passionate about supporting first-generation and transfer students. About 26 percent of our undergraduate students are the first in their families to go to college and nearly 20 percent of our students began their higher education at a community college. We've adopted new approaches to advising and have invested in our outstanding Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement — or CARE program — which intensively supports first-generation college students.

The strategic investments we have made in student success are paying off, not only for our students and their families, but for Florida taxpayers who support our state universities.

The quality of FSU's academic programs, supportive student environment, excellent student outcomes and affordability

are attracting applicants in record numbers. This year, we had nearly 80,000 first-year applications for about 6,000 spots, and we admitted our most academically talented class in school history.

In addition, graduate school applications were up 23 percent, and we welcomed a record number of graduate students this fall — a recognition of our excellent programs. *U.S. News & World Report* also ranked 20 of our graduate programs and specialties in the Top 25 among public universities. Our programs in education, business, law, and engineering all climbed in the rankings, and we also saw big jumps in statistics, chemistry, biology, and earth sciences.

While not losing sight of the university's commitment to student success, President McCullough is also focused on growing our research portfolio, which increased to record numbers this year. We're working to expand the university's external financial support, especially from the National Institutes of Health. We're doing that by increasing faculty resources and building the infrastructure and support needed to attract more research dollars.

We're hiring more full-time faculty who will educate the workforce of tomorrow while making outstanding contributions in research, including 155 additional faculty this fall.

The university has taken giant steps to create new research initiatives in the life sciences, medical research, health data sciences, aerospace and quantum science, and engineering.

One example of this is the new FSU Health initiative, a partnership with

Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare, which has the potential to transform health care delivery, education, and biomedical research in the region.

To support the FSU Health initiative, the Florida Legislature appropriated \$125 million to FSU for a new academic health center in Tallahassee that will offer advanced medical training and translational research opportunities. The university is also developing partnerships throughout North Florida that will allow the university to extend its reach through both research and clinical care. The goal is to make Tallahassee a regional health care destination.

The FSU Health Tallahassee center will provide about 130,000 square feet of medical and research-related space distributed over five floors. It will accommodate approximately 30 principal investigators and produce an estimated \$40 million in additional grant funding.

The preliminary conservative economic impact of the new health center alone is expected to add more than \$217 million annually and support more than 1,500 jobs directly and indirectly. During the construction phase, roughly 1,200 jobs will be created. Post construction and activation, the center will sustain more than 350 permanent positions.

The appropriation from the state for FSU Health was part of FSU's most successful legislative session in university history. FSU also received \$45 million in recurring operational funds, \$6.6 million in recurring funds for the FAMU-FSU College of Engineering, \$16.8 million for the National High Magnetic Field Laboratory and approximately \$90 million in capital funding for deferred maintenance at the Tallahassee campus, Panama City campus and FAMU-FSU College of Engineering and for critical infrastructure upgrades at the National High Magnetic Field Laboratory.

We are incredibly grateful to the Florida Legislature and Governor Ron DeSantis for their support and leadership during the last session. They understand that Florida State University is an excellent steward of taxpayer dollars and a wise investment.

While our main campus is in Tallahassee, our reach extends throughout the state, across the nation, and around the globe. We are excited to move forward in excellence.

Clay Ingram is the chief legislative affairs officer at Florida State University.



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Why It's Great...to be...

Mark Kaplan

Florida's future is undeniably bright. With its rapid population growth, economic and cultural vibrancy and opportunity, abundant natural resources, and a top-ranked state university system (for five straight years), the Sunshine State is poised to lead the nation and world.

The University of Florida is embracing its role in building our nation's future workforce, fueling its economic growth and prosperity, and addressing some of its most

pressing challenges.

From humble beginnings—with only 102 enrolled students and a handful of course offerings—to today, as one of America's top-ranked public research universities with more than 61,000 students, over 6,000 faculty members with distinguished records in teaching, research, and service, \$1 billion in research expenditures, and a transformative artificial intelligence initiative, our momentum as a university is only accelerating.

Florida—its employers and innovators—along with each and every one of the state’s 22.5 million residents benefit from that extraordinary progress, and we’re only just getting started.

UF provides world-class facilities, programs, experiential learning and research opportunities to foster knowledge and breakthroughs that shape a better future. We attract the best and brightest students who complete their degrees on time with little debt and equipped with the skills needed to excel in their careers and take their place in today’s unique, fast-paced workforce.

That \$1 billion in research spending—a recent milestone that adds UF to an exclusive group of only 15 public universities—represents the extent to which UF faculty and students are putting their intellect and talent to work for the good of the community, state, and world.

UF researchers are leading breakthroughs for treatment of brain tumors, diabetes, and Parkinson’s; strengthening Florida’s agriculture industry by developing new crops and using artificial intelligence in precision agriculture; identifying and sharing best practices to help children learn to read and master math; understanding how to improve coastal health and stop red tide in its tracks; discovering how to grow plants in lunar soil; and detecting malicious computer hardware components that could jeopardize cybersecurity of critical infrastructure.

But just conducting great research is not enough. UF excels at moving innovations and discoveries from the lab to the marketplace. UF’s Sid Martin Biotechnology incubator has been recognized as the

top incubator in the world three times in the past decade, the first three-time award-ee, and our newest incubator, the Hub, is also receiving global recognition. A recent analysis ranked the University of Florida second among all U.S. public and private universities (behind only Carnegie Mellon) at moving new discoveries from the lab and into the real world through research commercialization and STEM graduates.

What does this mean for Florida? It means that great ideas and innovative discoveries become thriving businesses that contribute to the health and vitality of our state’s citizens and economy.

While the technology and innovation that our faculty, staff, and students create is impactful and important, the students who graduate from UF have an even bigger impact on our state. To better prepare students for the world that lies ahead, UF is the first university in the country to implement a bold initiative that will integrate artificial intelligence (AI) across all aspects of campus, including instruction, research, university operations and professional and continuing education.

UF is building the AI university of the future, producing an AI-savvy workforce and leveraging our world-class technology infrastructure to benefit our state and nation. This means students in all majors, at all degree levels, may acquire either a basic understanding, competence or expertise in this technology and its applications tailored to their disciplines and careers. We are also driving workforce and economic development in AI through partnerships with leading technology companies, including NVIDIA, SAS and IBM, as well as

partnerships with our counterparts in the State University System of Florida (SUS), the Florida College System, the institutions that belong to the Southeastern Conference (SEC) and K-12 schools in our state.

UF is fortunate to be home to one of the most powerful and smartest AI supercomputers in the world, a machine we call HiPerGator AI—a gift from UF alumnus Chris Malachowsky and the company he co-founded, NVIDIA. We have opened access to HiPerGator to researchers at SUS and SEC institutions to facilitate their research in every discipline. To date, more than 100 researchers across the SUS have made use of HiPerGator to accelerate their discoveries in environmental science, technology, medicine, and other areas.

Of course, as a public university, this doesn't happen on its own. We are grateful to our alumni and donors and to Florida's legislature and Governor for their commitment and support. Helping UF and Florida's other universities climb in the rankings and earn sustained recognition for all we are accomplishing together will continue to provide a strong return on investment.

It's easy for me to brag about my fellow Gators, but what is happening here is about more than just pride. As Florida's colleges and universities do better, our state does better. Research breakthroughs solve pressing problems and create new opportunities. Graduates who are prepared to contribute and lead drive a thriving economy. And the visibility that comes with having the top-ranked system of higher education in the nation can create opportunity beyond anything our great state has experienced before.

Whether it is growing plants in lunar soil in preparation for NASA's extended stay on the moon, or seeking world-class advancements in medicine, or bringing science to bear on early childhood learning and literacy to give the workforce of the future the best start in education possible—the faculty, staff and students of UF are focused on what's next.

Mark Kaplan is Vice President for Government and Community Relations for the University of Florida.

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